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ABSTRACT

This monograph presents a study of cultural interchange in a second/third grade classroom within a parent-founded school. It follows one child from a religious family who traveled a long distance, both geographically and psychologically, from home to school. The study addresses influences that students encountered in traveling between home and school, focusing on cultural interchange. The researcher was in the classroom several days each week for 1 academic year and attended most parent events. She met and interviewed parents and families. This monograph looks at how families came to know the classroom; the theme of the classroom, which was living together and sharing perspectives; questions about thinking in racial and ethnic types; religiosity at home and the effect on the school experience; differing perspectives between home and school; and opening the doors for new thinking. The monograph concludes with implications that evolved from the interaction between the classroom and the family (e.g., cultural interchange is based on relationships that grow over time, professionals must cultivate a working trust with families, and unexpected differences are difficult to detect). (Contains 68 references.) (SM)

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Between Home and School

Cultural Interchange in an Elementary Classroom

Kathe Jervis

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The Series on Cultural Interchange

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Building School-Family Partnerships in a South Bronx Classroom

This study of a fifth grade classroom presents three children and their families and the relationships they developed with the teacher, the ethnographer, and the school community, ranging from intense and collaborative to distant and fearful. The study explores the process of cultural interchange between the school and the families.

Kathe Jervis

Between Home and School: Cultural Interchange in an Elementary Classroom

This study of a second/third grade classroom in a parent-founded school follows a child from a religious family who travels a long distance, both geographically and psychologically, from home to school. The study tries to understand the distances some children must travel between home and the classroom and the influences they encounter along the way.

Kemly A. McGregor

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This is a study of a small high school's attempt to create an intellectual culture that draws on and validates the realities of its students. While the school has been successful in reaching those children whose assumptions and values mirror its own, it still struggles to find a point of connection with those children who do not share those values.

Jianzhong Xu

Reaching Out to Other People's Children in an Urban Middle School: The Families' Views

This study documents four families' reactions to the experiences their children encounter at school, showing how the families' interpretations are shaped by their perceptions of the roles played by the school, the parents, and the children, and how these perceptions are further mediated by their racial consciousness, class, and the gender of their children.

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Between Home and School

Cultural Interchange in an Elementary Classroom

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Preface to the Series on Cultural Interchange

In 1996, our NCREST-based team, dismayed by the inadequate educational progress of too many children in our country's public schools, began the research project reported in this monograph series. Various theories purported to shed light on the American dilemma of how to educate children outside the mainstream; some of the theories we agreed with, others we didn't. One explanation, which intrigued us because it raised issues for which we had no answers, was that cultural barriers between home and school stood in the way of educational progress, especially for poor children and children of color (Comer, 1993; Delpit, 1995; Fine, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1994; Poplin & Weeres, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Herbert Kohl, in his book, *I Won't Learn From You!: The Role of Assent in Learning* (1991), put the matter most starkly when he said that some African-American and Latino children refused to learn in school because they believed that participating in the educational process meant accepting a cultural system that categorized them as inferior.

While there was something in this literature that rang true, we weren't sure how to connect it with our experience in public schools that were engaging poor and minority students in innovative learning communities (Bensman, 1994; Jervis, 1996; Snyder et al., 1992). In these schools, researchers saw evidence that most children acquired the skills and knowledge they needed to succeed in higher education, the world of work, and within their communities; they did not seem to choose between school and family. What made it possible for children in these schools to cross cultural boundaries? This question piqued our curiosity.

So we began our study.[1] Our four-person research team conceptualized the classroom as the most appropriate place to observe what we called "cultural interchange." We began by defining cultural interchange as the process by which members of groups with different traditions, values, beliefs, and experiences gained a greater degree of mutual understanding. We were looking for examples where teachers, students, and families drew lessons from each other and used those lessons to improve and enrich the ways they approached the world. We had our eyes open for instances where study participants were willing to accept some measures of disequilibrium, to shift or expand their

[1]This work is supported by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement Field-initiated grant #R306F60079. The perspectives represented here are our responsibility, not the granting agency.

worldview a little, to occasionally have their assumptions upset, and to tolerate the uncertainty that accompanies encounters with strangers.

We did not mean culture to be a code word for race. In thinking about culture, elements of behavior and mind-set produced by ethnic identification most readily spring to mind, but we assumed ethnic identification was only one of many aspects of culture. Ideas of what is valuable, what is beautiful, or what is successful are defined not only by ethnicity but by other factors such as social class, age, religion, race, and geographic locale. Culture, as it plays out in classrooms and schools, is complex and multifaceted, and we expected the interchange of culture between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and students among themselves to draw on all of these elements—although not always, and not always at the same time.

We began by looking at interchange in classrooms and school communities—with all the power differentials that implies—to capture and render a concept whereby teachers, students, and families learned from each other and integrated elements of each other's mind-frames into their own views of the world. We each pursued the idea of cultural interchange in our own way, and each of our studies took a divergent route. We ultimately drew differing conclusions about the usefulness of cultural interchange as a concept.

Each researcher worked in a different school. Although we predicated our research design on each setting's uniqueness and only loosely coupled our work to each other, we recognized that learning to overcome our own biases and take off our own blinders was essential. Capitalizing on our various backgrounds (academic researchers and former teachers, men and women, American and foreign-born, Asian, European, and African-American), we planned strategies to make ourselves more open to the cultural repertoire of students, families, and school personnel. While we individually analyzed our own data and wrote our own drafts, we collectively developed questions and concepts from which we could all draw. We visited each others' schools, watched videotapes of team members' study sites, and jointly interviewed personnel from each of the sites. Over time, we grew increasingly impressed by how differently we perceived and understood student behavior and classroom practice.

We chose schools to encompass a spectrum of student ages and, we hoped, educational practices. Access to the schools was a crucial determinant for our selection. Our presence as ethnographers was bound to be intrusive, so we selected only schools where we were known by someone on the staff. Using various ethnographic methods, each of us spent the academic year with teachers who were ready to open themselves up to the scrutiny required by this research. After spending some time at our site, we asked several students and their parents to participate in our study. We paid teachers and families for cooperating. Soon we were accompanying students to after-school activities and into their homes, churches, and communities.

Our observations focused on occasions when students brought their cultural perspectives into the collective discourse, or teachers represented their own worldviews or the knowledge of institutional culture, their "sense of school," to students or families. Throughout, we observed the texture of human relations. The "we" here means

the research team, but each of us perceived the world differently. We variously asked: Whose values were accorded respect? Whose values went unrecognized or were unconsciously ignored? Which students and families were included and participated? Which students and families were excluded or denied full participation? We attempted to understand underlying factors that shaped what we perceived as matches and mismatches among teachers, students, and their families. For this NCREST series on Cultural Interchange, we have produced four strikingly different case studies, each in a singular voice, each of which stands alone.

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Introduction and Background

Both parenting and teaching are notoriously complicated, uncertain, ambiguous enterprises. When we—teachers and parents—hear one another's stories, the details of our own become clearer. The more we understand, the more insight we bring to the next encounter, and the more solidly we can act upon what we have learned. I have written this family and classroom story because we need to know more about how individual teachers and families imagine the world and make decisions on behalf of children. The "we" here includes any of us who teach children across racial, ethnic, class, or religious boundaries, which includes most teachers in urban settings.

Teachers and school personnel need to recognize the powerful values in the home that support a child's development. When these home values are ignored, the child suffers (Suina, 1991; Weber, 1997). It takes effort for teachers to be aware of home values, since these values are not automatic or naturally visible in school. Teachers need not (and cannot) reconstitute the home at school, both because parents have an unconditional attachment to their children, which teachers cannot duplicate, and because teachers can never know their children as do parents (Weber, 1997). But by paying attention to attitudes and rethinking strategies for involving families, teachers can become more flexible in developing ways to acknowledge children's home values in school. Teachers can invite families to join the classroom community by providing multiple entry points, knowing that not every family will enter at the same place or benefit from the same kind of contact.

The story at the heart of this monograph brings forward the McMann family, whose religious beliefs only came to light slowly and whose demographics and experience with school diverged most clearly from the teacher's and from mine. These differences led me to look closely at this family's connection to the classroom and what supported their daughter Deborah's learning. The distance between the classroom and the McMann family centered most dramatically around religion, but similar divides face all teachers who teach across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries. Let this story stand for other instances where worldviews of teachers and families are far apart and hard to discuss.

The opportunity to explore these issues arose when our NCREST-based team set out to document how teachers, parents, and children express and respond to differences in cultural values and experiences. After many years of teaching children in

kindergarten through eighth grades and writing about my own and other teachers' classrooms, this project provoked an old quandary about what teachers needed to know of children's home lives. Attempting to understand the distances some children travel between home and school made perfect sense but, like most teachers, I had rarely observed students and their families beyond school. My early training suggested that the best information came from looking closely at a child's work and daily classroom life, since I could only intervene based on what I saw at school. This project has allowed me to think more about the powerful influences that operate beneath the surface of observable behavior and about what happens when I and other teachers see—or fail to see—children reflected through their own cultural lens.

Society's expectation is that children will be changed by school, but our team is arguing for cultural interchange—that school practice should also evolve in response to children and acknowledge home values more centrally in the classroom. We set out to show that culture (construed more broadly than race or ethnicity) mattered to children's learning, but we did not know how it mattered. We suspected that if teachers ignored the culture of the home, children would not form strong enough relationships to allow them to engage in the school's agenda.

This monograph has several parts. Before I tell the story of Deborah and her family, I explain my relationship with the teacher; I then set the context of the classroom by outlining the multiple ways Deborah's teacher draws parents into the classroom. Next, to give a flavor of what values parents and children encounter in Deborah's classroom, I describe and analyze the classroom circle—the time that children spend together in whole-group conversation. Finally, since any discussion of cultural relations requires bringing race and ethnicity to the surface—even in a case study about religion—I include a section that raises (but does not answer) questions about how a White teacher thinks about these topics while teaching predominately multiracial children.

For this study, I chose Diane Mullins' second/third grade classroom at PS 3 in New York City, where I had observed in 1981–82 (Jervis, 1986, 1991). Children in Diane's classroom are emotionally and intellectually engaged; they and Diane are "visible" (her word) to each other and to me, which makes it a good place to observe, to explore my questions, and to write about them.[1] By choosing Diane's classroom for this project, I do not mean to propose a "right" way of teaching that ensures children's growth or to contend that she has a corner on it. I am not suggesting that Diane has magic charisma, a replicable program, or that she fits the pedagogical model for Ladson-Billings' "culturally relevant teacher" (1994). Diane's way is only one possibility among many. Diane's practices permit children and families to make known their own agendas; thus her classroom allowed me a window into their assumptions, values, interests, and aspirations.

[1]Teachers, but not scholars, are often referred to by first names in academic writing, emphasizing the tradition that knowledge about teaching and learning is created by those outside the classroom rather than those inside. Although I disagree with that naming convention, I have used Diane's first name and the first names of parents for two reasons. First, because first names are the tradition at PS 3. First names are also an indication of the peer relationship as teacher and parent that I sought to develop. We did this work together. To protect the privacy of children who are too young to give consent, the names of all family members are pseudonyms.

Diane understood that my sweep was broad and placed no limits on our work. We had a history together. From my notes:

> I had come to PS 3 to teach writing through drama, but within seconds of stepping through Diane's third/fourth grade classroom door, Tommy engaged me in a discussion of the bonding properties of molecules. Atomic theory is ordinarily too abstract for a ten year old, but Tommy, an overweight child with shoulder-length blond hair and a dirty face, had in his hands some interlocking beads from a college chemistry class. He was insistent: "Come look what I found out." His jeans, which fit tight around the waist, must have once belonged to a much taller person; the long, frayed pants legs kept catching under the heels of his shoes, causing him to shuffle as he led me to his table. I was captivated and captured. No time to look around, except for glimpses. I saw Jan, tongue protruding, wire-framed spectacles sliding down the bridge of her nose, as she hunched over the typewriter, pecking out her thoughts one letter at a time. There was Monique, looking older than the other third/fourth graders, on the rug, surrounded by an admiring claque, openly discussing "my first menstrual period."
>
> Out of the corner of my eye—experienced from years of teaching and observing classrooms—disarray jumped out at me, but so did involved children, none of whom seemed directed by the teacher. Besides writing and science, there was intense running in the halls as well as intense sitting in the corner with a friend. No tuned out passive kids in this classroom. No fill-in-the-blank busywork, either. Diane moved slowly around the room, sitting at tables with kids, mainly listening, her intricate long earrings swinging gently as she monitored the room. For the next three weeks, I taught Greek myths to small groups. I was astonished to see how the children ran this classroom by themselves. It was their classroom, not Diane's. No child's self-chosen activity seemed more valued by the teacher than any other. Diane asserted that children who wanted what I had to offer would join my skits. Jan and Tommy never joined. Monique never missed. Diane refused the principal's mandate that I culminate this teaching with a polished all-class performance for the whole school: "A class play involves too much teacher-imposed energy that doesn't follow the children's directions," she said.
>
> I was intrigued by this classroom of children I had come upon in midyear. When my consulting days ran out, I stayed anyway. As gripping as it was for me, I was also shaken up. I disagreed violently with much of what I saw, especially when it interfered with "my" curriculum. I never stopped asking questions. Diane finally said with some weariness, "I am not an explainer. Join us and see for yourself."

That description, written in February 1981, still sits in my files reminding me of my first taste of Diane's classroom. I accepted her invitation and spent the 1981-82

academic year forcing her to become "an explainer," insisting that she be explicit about every teaching decision she made.

Diane and I sailed—or slogged—through that year. After I spent hours in class taking notes, we spent more hours together after school reflecting upon what happened. Half the time I was exhilarated and half the time I had a headache as I began to rethink my own teaching values. Although I questioned much about Diane's practice, she never backed off from what she did or never flinched under my criticism. I realized long after I finished the year that Diane's unconflicted aversion to "thinking in types"—indeed her aversion to anything that categorized children without recognizing their strengths—helped me to see differences and refrain from labeling them as deficits. When I began observing Diane in order to write about a "whole classroom," she compelled me to see "whole children."

After I returned to teach middle school and continued to write about my own and others' teaching, I came to see that the studies I wrote about Diane's students were actually steps toward articulating my own values and teaching practices. That year Diane taught me how forcing children to learn academics or forcing them to show mature behavior faster than they were capable worked against their solid growth, and how "*my*" curriculum, if imposed with a heavy hand, interfered. I marveled at how Diane tolerated the idiosyncrasies of individuals who sometimes made group life difficult. Finally, I saw how her own quests for a child's questions and her capacity to protect time for children's own quests for answers supported their learning. Much to my surprise, it even substantially raised their test scores (Jervis, 1991).

In September 1996, I returned to Diane's classroom with the same "luxurious perspective of the undistracted eye" we had agreed on in 1981: I would write and she would teach. Diane welcomed me back. Now a world class "explainer," she had gained the ability to articulate exactly why she decides as she does in the classroom and had published several articles on her own teaching (Mullins, 1988, 1992, 1995). Both in 1995 and 1998, she received the annual Lillian Weber Award from City College Workshop Center, a shared acknowledgment for both teacher and student teacher for their "contribution to the development of an environment and classroom context that supports children's learning."

Diane has been teaching at PS 3 for twenty-four years. She walks to school each day through the neighborhood where she was born, raised, and went to public school. Now in her early fifties, she is proud of her family's working-class origins, of her heritage from her Welsh father and New York-born mother and from her maternal Eastern European Jewish grandparents. Ten years ago, Diane wrote: "How can we make our schools work?. . . I am asking teachers to make the revolution in our schools by approaching the commitment of parents to their children and by making their own values known" (Mullins, 1988, p. 13). In the spirit of making her values known, she joined me in this work. That she was paid $3,000 interested her little; she ultimately gave the money to a charity that helps homeless families.

The McMann family (Virginia, her husband Peter, and Deborah and her two sisters) graciously came forward to allow me in their home to follow their experience

in Diane's class. The grant paid them $1,000, as it did two additional study families, to compensate them for their time, energy, and willingness to undergo the scrutiny this research required. I am profoundly indebted to the families and to Diane for their cooperation and collegial exploration of cultural interchange.

PS 3 was founded by parents in 1971. In 1994, after the first principal's death, the community renamed it the John Melser Charrette School. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, about this "head teacher," as he liked to be called. He was seen one day disciplining a group of children, his tall frame lowered to meet them eye-to-eye. In his New Zealand accent, he gently demanded that they must never, never slide down the banister again. Then he took his leave, sliding down the banister. That spirit still infuses the school as children learn to raise their own voices, question authority, and negotiate their own education. This stance conforms to some children's experience and not others.

The school's original plan called for the right to hire teachers, but that plan did not eventuate and the school lives within the constraints of the Board of Education/union staffing patterns. Rather than lament this bureaucratic vise, the diverse classrooms give the school an interesting texture. Strong teachers operate autonomously, each with their own outside-of-school professional networks and connections to different institutions that provide student teachers. In the absence of whole school conversations that strive to make each other's pedagogy and philosophy known and shared by each other, diverse teaching styles and teaching practices exist side by side. Diane's classroom exemplifies one variation.

CHAPTER

1

How Families Came to Know the Classroom

No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots, or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history, our culture; a memory, sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear, of the streets of our childhood.

Paulo Freire (1994, p.31)

Just because I talk too proper; just because I sometimes hang out with white people; just because I'm high yalla honey-coated dipped in tea-colored soda water almost white with back too tight, don't make me not Black!

Allison Francis (1996, p. 126)

Parents saw the classroom uniquely through their own values, educational histories, and aspirations for their children.[2] Creating a common ground in the classroom from such diverse home cultures requires negotiation and compromise on both sides. Families literally hand over their second and third graders to teachers; therefore, warm relationships with parents strengthen the children's ability to negotiate this handover. It is children, however, who must mediate between home and school, and this necessary transition propels them out in the world, even when such passage erodes the safety, ease, and belonging that Diane wants for children and their families.[3] Since school

[2]I was in the classroom at least three full days each week for an academic year and attended most parent events. I met forty-five parents out of a possible fifty-four. Three fathers and one mother lived outside New York City. Four other fathers, either separated or divorced, and one mother never came to school and, for reasons having to do with particular family dynamics, I never contacted them. Ultimately, I had informal and/or formal contact with all but two children's families. Two families with whom I spent time refused me permission to tell their stories. Therefore, I talked formally in prearranged taped interviews with ten parents/couples and informally with ten more parents/couples with whom I had taped interviews during the course of the year. I talked with (and taped) parents while on trips, while waiting for children to be picked up after school, and at all-school events like picnics, graduation, Halloween, and the last day of school. With three of the study families, I spent much more time, including staying with one family for several days.

[3]In a mesmerizing reflection on teaching, entitled "My First Intellectual: An Ex-Jock Remembers the Teacher Who Changed His Life," Mark Edmundson, a Professor of English, taps into the distance between his home and school. He observes that all good teaching involves a "touch of kidnapping" and isn't without costs (*Lingua Franca*, March 1999, p. 60).

can separate children from their homes, it is crucial that teachers make it possible for all children to acquire the skills and knowledge they need without choosing between school and home. Diane once wrote, "When children and teachers are working toward something not of their own design, the classroom becomes difficult for the child. It is trying, as well, for the parent who feels removed from the school" (Mullins, 1988, p. 12). Diane puts serious energy into dissipating any parental "feeling of remove," but families must be willing to engage with her, and the road is sometimes rocky.

Multiple Entry Points to Engaging in School Life

No one contests that Diane began the year with school-ready parents. Very few families in Diane's class arrived at PS 3 by accident, which suggests parents' determination to find the most appropriate school for their children—perhaps a good predictor of school success (Lareau, 1989). The demographics of this cohort confirm the considerable data that children of first-generation immigrants from practically everywhere are more highly motivated and pressured to succeed in the system (and often do) than children in the next generation, especially if they are children of color and, therefore, not so easily assimilated in a race-conscious society.

Beyond "Standard" Demographics

The diversity of students is one reason many families choose to send their children to PS 3.[4] For an exploration of cultural interchange, perhaps the most striking demo-

[4]PS 3 is a neighborhood school, but children living outside of the district may apply to attend. By the same application process, some neighborhood children attend other schools. Although the demographics defy categories, convention demands listing official indicators for the 550 students, lest it appear I forgot to notice. Current records show ethnicity as 67% white, 14% black, 12% Hispanic, and 7% Asian. The figures, however, make nonsense of reality, since the Board of Education form implies that both parents belong to the same arbitrary category. More to the point, this school has a high number of interracialfamilies, receives federal money to support integration, and is known to be a comfortable place for gay and lesbian parents and teachers (*New York Times*, 5/14/97).

Twenty percent of school families receive free lunch. Between the time we applied for this grant and the time it was granted, the mayor had moved the homeless shelters from the city to outlying boroughs, so there were no homeless families in this classroom. Diane took seriously the confidentiality of the free and reduced-fee lunch forms, so I never knew for sure how many of the children applied. Unlike 1981-82, when children who received free lunches had a lunch pass, such distinctions were no longer public. Any child who forgot lunch, liked the menu, or was actually entitled ate school food. At the end of each month, parents sent money owed for lunches, prompted by a posted sign.

Children in New York City currently are not tested before third grade. During the first year of the study, the third grade scores at PS 3 ranged from 1st percentile to 99th-plus percentile. Scores in 1996 showed 60% of third graders reading at grade level (*New York Times*, 1/5/97, p. 10, City Section).

Parents have resisted programs for the gifted; families can find tracked ability groups or gifted classes at other city schools if that is what they want for their children. There is a special education class identified as Modified Instructional Services, level 1 (MIS 1), for children younger than seven, pull-out English as a Second Language, Reading Recovery, and daily resource room help for those children who are certified.

graphic—defying any generalization about what families bring to school—is that in Diane's 1996-97 class of twenty-seven children, no one ethnic group predominated. Reflecting a rich New York City diversity that increasingly heralds the country's future, parents were born in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Dutch New Guinea, Egypt, England, France, Grenada, Holland, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Puerto Rico, Russia, and the United States. Children with mixed ethnic heritages and racial identities were the norm, and children with two European-American parents were the minority. The three student teachers over the year were born in China, Korea, and Bangladesh.

As the United States increasingly becomes home to intermarrying partners who arrive from all over the world in all kinds of circumstances, standard demographic and socioeconomic categories no longer adequately describe families. Several parents grew up in desperate poverty; others identified themselves as among the African-American community's "Talented Tenth." When a mother from an illiterate family in a developing country marries the grandson of Howard University's first medical school graduate, pinning one ethnic or racial label on this union makes no sense. Not so long ago, school personnel filled out census forms by "eyeball." Today, parents are asked to self-identify, but instructions do not ask them to check all categories that apply. The records say that sixteen percent of New York City public school children are "White" (*New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1998). Children in Diane's class came from so many cultures that ascertaining who was "White" provoked hard thinking and confounded the figures perpetuated by the Board of Education forms.[5]

In Diane's class, economic, religious, educational, employment circumstances, and family constellations existed in unusual configurations, producing unpredictable twists. One parent, a member of a marginalized ethnic group, had no current economic safety net, an itinerant job history, and an unfinished graduate degree; a White male making a mid-career change chose poverty while training for a potentially secure future; a young, single Asian-American father bartered craft skills on an ad hoc basis. A child of a Puerto Rican high-school dropout had more financial resources than a child of a White unemployed professional. Some families lived below the poverty line and their children attended school alongside children whose two parents each earned working-class or middle-income salaries. Young, single Latino fathers took responsibility that defied the textbook examples of noninvolvement. African-American Buddhist, African-Caribbean Seventh-day Adventist, and Colombian Catholic parents all sent their children off to a public school to be educated together.

Education and artistic and/or entrepreneurial spirit was more in evidence than job security or money. In one instance, a French-speaking parent took reservations for several hours at a French restaurant in exchange for a daily meal for himself and his child. As a group, the families in this classroom had energy and vitality even

[5]In *MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*, 17-year-old Tennessee Reed says that "mixed kids are the fastest-growing group of children in the United States" (p. 114), and that he "doesn't fit anywhere." Other essays in the section, "To Pass or Not to Pass" (pp. 113–142), are variations on how the authors dislike being labeled (Reed, 1996).

when, from time to time, individual families faced financial, health, employment, or marital crises.

Parents worried about the future. Recurring stories stood out about the lack of economic benefits that accompany the itinerant and self-employed. Fathers, in particular, told of single parenthood with no life insurance; single mothers, in particular, told of serious illness with no health benefits. Affordable housing, always seriously in short supply in New York City, meant large extended families living in too-small spaces with children sleeping on the floor or families of two or three living in tiny, expensive apartments. Although many parents made a point of affirming public education, seventeen families mentioned private schools (two families spoke of religious schools rather than independent schools) as something that was possibly desirable but economically unrealistic.

The take-home lesson from this brief description is the impossibility of generalizing about any home cultures. This diversity is new territory for schools; simplistic thinking does not suffice.

School Support for Parents and Parent Support for Schools

Having enrolled their children in this school, parents expected a "custom-made" rather than a "generic" education (Lareau, 1989), although cultural differences may have dispersed families along a continuum of how involved or welcomed in this classroom they expected to be. What these families from all over the world found in this New York City second/third grade was Diane.

In the first year with Diane, parents had to adjust. This environment could not help but create dissonance between some parental views and Diane's strong values about what constitutes successful learning for children. Coming to understand "this many-thing-happening environment," as one father put it, was not always comfortable or smooth. Most families struggled with some degree of "foreignness" to the classroom, even if born and educated in the United States. One mother, new to PS 3, taught in an alternative school, so she "got" Diane's pedagogy. She reported immediately that her child found Diane "exactly his type," yet her own European mother, who had major responsibility for child care, found the foul language on the playground highly distressing and was on the phone with Diane at once ("Cursing is not part of my background!"). All families had to rethink, adjust, and shift their worldview, at least a little, as Diane responded to who was present without compromising her own values.

Diane worked hard at drawing parents in and creating opportunities for them to gain knowledge of the classroom. They had to be willing, however, to persist over several weeks in a setting that may not have made sense to them. This classroom required children to engage in very different modes of learning than parents themselves had known and to develop significantly different relationships with the teacher than parents may have experienced. What parents saw was not school as they usually knew it. But slowly, through formal and informal relationships with Diane, their own exposure to the classroom, and attention to their own children's experiences, parents "got" what this

classroom was about. Gradually, over time, Diane's understanding of individual parents changed, in small fine-grained ways, the way she responded to their children.

This expansion of a classroom community to include *all* families in an equitable and caring relationship with the teacher does not happen naturally (Epstein, 1995). Opening up a space for others requires a strong commitment and a strong personality, both of which Diane exercised with a low profile. Yet there is a complex cyclical dilemma built into this notion of a strong autonomous teacher. If the presence of parents comes only with the teacher's consent, then teachers and parents are not partners here. But when teachers have no autonomy, the parent's suggestions cannot be taken and teachers do not have the latitude to respond according to their best judgment. Yet the more the teacher is "in control," the more the classroom belongs to the teacher. Parents can become an intrusion on the "teacher's classroom." Further, if teachers become engaged in professional development that reinforces their stance as "experts," they may widen the gap between parental "experts" who know their children best and teachers who are experts in their own classroom.

The New York City Board of Education Annual School Report includes parent participation. Interestingly, the forms divide up the response space into two categories: "Parental Support for Schools" and "School Support for Parents." In this classroom, these categories amounted to the same thing. Parents accompanied school trips, for instance, not only to increase adult supervision, but also—under Diane's careful orchestration—to enjoy themselves and observe their own children interacting with others. I believe that when parent support for schools *and* school support for parents occurs close to the child in early elementary school, it is the most important arena for participation and partnership. To be sure, parents had access to other quite powerful school governance committees and all-school volunteer opportunities. This parent-founded school generated myriad opportunities to govern, but parents of the class did not take them; I am speculating that parents got sufficiently caught up in multiple classroom opportunities that fulfilled their needs. Although many parents volunteered to help with all-school events, they neither ran them nor did they venture into committees or school-wide councils, many of which invited nonelective participation. The "rightness" of the fit between what parents wanted and what Diane offered in the classroom may decline as children grow older, but in second/third grade, it worked for these parents.

Dissonance

The notion of school that parents found in Diane's classroom often caused disequilibrium, but stimulated by Diane, parents tended to have energy and savvy to rise to the challenge of grappling with divergent values. Or at least they set aside what bothered them and chose to focus on common ground built from increased knowledge, developing relationships, and growing trust.

Parents differed in what drew them into the classroom. Parents who were comfortable in school took up Diane's invitation to visit, often in a spirit of checking up (Lareau, 1989). Parents who were less comfortable approaching school joined more slowly as Diane reached out to them. Parents accompanied class trips, where Diane worked hard both to see

that they would want to come again and that they had opportunities to see her in action so they would be able to trust her with their children. Parents dropped in unannounced, stayed in the morning, or came early to pick up their children. Eventually, parents ran small group activities (cooking, poetry, a newsletter, drama). One mother spent every Friday in the classroom, a father arrived periodically to be an extra adult when Diane withdrew to conference with individual children, and two fathers regularly swam with the class and supervised the boys. One mother typed the class literary magazine, giving her a window into her child's peers and their thinking. Every child's family came to scheduled conferences. Class picnics, plays, and other all-school events multiplied opportunities for contact.

Diane wrote frequent letters home to parents and twice yearly narrative report cards, which were translated into their home language, if necessary (Mullins, 1992). She also valued parents' own writing, if they chose to do it, but the written word was not for every parent: The written communications hardly seeped into the consciousness of some families, and one mother refused to write because of an initial lack of trust.[6] Nor did many families attend the monthly parent gatherings Diane formed for parents to look at children's work, reflect on homework, and get to know other parents. These meetings, however, were crucially important for some families, especially those for whom the distance from the classroom was greatest. Virginia McMann only missed one meeting.

For parents whose work schedules allowed it and whose values encouraged it, direct observation worked. As a matter of school policy, PS 3 allows families unrestricted access to classrooms (unusual in schools), although not all teachers in the school welcomed parents enthusiastically. Diane's classroom door was always open, whether children were calmly working at tables, sprawled on the floor in what adults might call disarray, or in a noisy transition from one activity to another. Diane found it helpful for parents to see their children doing whatever it was they were doing. Parents joined whatever activity was taking place.

Not all parents applauded what they saw. Diane can raise her voice in irritability (fatigue and her recovery from major surgery may have increased the volume), and one parent found "harsh" what Diane called her "show and tell" anger. But with more time in the classroom, this parent saw that the children "learned to read" Diane's mood and tone, just as Diane read the children's energy and rhythm. Almost always, what parents saw required rethinking over time, but firsthand experience began the process. One parent's comment about how she came to understand the classroom was typical:

> At first I was a little worried because I hear Diane likes screaming and yelling, or says, "I don't want to talk to you now. . . . " But a couple of times I sit. . . I come early and I thought about it and I talk with my husband and I think maybe it is all right since the way I see it as a process, how you and children approach each other. And children these days, you have to scare them. . . otherwise they won't listen. I

[6]The story of this parent's developing relationship is told by Diane, the parent, and me in an unpublished paper, "In the Face of my Resistance. . . :Stephanie's Parent and Teacher Gain a Working Trust."

> come away from class wondering, how does she do it? So I get over that. Her class is very real.

Many parents came to appreciate the classroom for their child's love of school and set aside what bothered them for what they felt their children gained. Interestingly, parents in Diane's class seemed to feel responsible for their children's learning—no one blamed Diane for what children did not know, even when it was a matter of basic skills such as multiplication tables. Perhaps parent's classroom participation encouraged them to feel responsible and, if they felt it important, they took on rote teaching tasks themselves.

All of these avenues of participation promoted opportunities for increased mutual understandings between families and teacher, but what worked for one family did not necessarily work for another. As parents began to make sense of Diane's classroom for themselves, various entry points touched parents in different ways: No one way worked for every parent, but over time, parents and Diane began to know each other in ways that made warm connections and empathetic identification with each other possible.

In Deborah's second year, her mother came to know Diane better through the monthly meetings Diane organized for parents to look at children's work. Held from 5:15 to 6:45 p.m. on the first Thursday of every month while children played together in the after-school program (until 6:00 p.m. anyway when they hung around the fringes of the classroom), a handful of parents gathered around tables in Diane's class.

Teachers cannot do their best work alone. For twenty years, Diane has been involved with Patricia Carini and her colleagues at the Prospect Center for Education and Research in North Bennington, Vermont (Prospect, 1986). This national network of educators uses observation and description as grounding for teaching practice and inquiry. For Diane, these groups build a community based on shared knowledge about children and change the participants in fundamental ways: "People will not stand for a nontrusting relationship after they participate in this group. You have to be your own honest self and that feels good so you never want to give it up."

Each month, the group used the Prospect Center's formal processes to describe a child's writing or drawing. Adhering to the formality meant that each participant anchored her (yes, all women) contributions to the child's work to resist the all too human tendency to speculate, interpret, or judge. The formality dictated only one statement per go-around from each person, so more facile thinkers and talkers checked themselves, which slowed down the process and supported respectful listening. Over time, the group built a community based on shared knowledge about children—"Deep Talk as Knowing"—as Margaret Himley calls it (1991, pp. 57–72). Helped by this formal structure, Diane learned what parents thought, and parents learned what Diane thought. Virginia came to all but one meeting.

CHAPTER

2

The Theme of Diane's Classroom: "Living Together and Sharing Perspectives"

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.

John Dewey, 1916, p. 101

The quality of classroom life depends on everyone belonging to a psychologically safe community, especially for children who differ from a conventional classroom norm for whatever reason: physical difference (accent, skin color, size, unusual features); family difference (economic class, who children live with, sexual orientation of family members); or behavioral difference (maturity, capacity to conform to expectation, temperamental crankiness). What eases the experience of school for children likely to be on the margins, I am coming to understand, is how Diane uses the classroom to open up a space for children to be themselves at the same time they learn to belong to a community. This "easing" school depends on Diane's autonomy. Without the latitude to respond to children and their families, any teacher's potential for easing school is substantially decreased. Diane exercises her autonomy broadly and her classroom depends on it.

Finessing the System: Authority and Rules

Diane's almost weekly field trips are central to her pedagogy. As she constructs them, the trips expose children to experiences they otherwise would not have; enable children to

see facets of each other that don't appear in a classroom; occasion the mixed company of children, teachers, parents, and student teachers; encourage a good time; and produce confidence that travel in the wider world is safe.[7] Trips in her class decidedly do not teach specific content, culminate or launch a specific study, seek thrills (no amusement parks on her list), act as a reward, or offer a break from the monotony of the four classroom walls. Rather, trips are the substance of daily existence that supports children's learning. On trips and in the discussion afterwards, adults and children "meet" (Diane's word for come to know) each other's values—and build the classroom culture, since trips generate common experiences, common language, and common memories.

An Emblematic Trip

The following characteristic vignette from my notes helps to understand Diane's classroom (6/2/97):

> I arrive at 8:30 a.m. Diane has ordered a school bus for a field trip, but switches destinations at the last minute to avoid the Botanical Gardens in the pouring rain. When we get to the Museum of Natural History at 9:45, there is a snag. The dispatcher of school buses declines to let us out because we aren't on his list. He stands at the bus door looking up at Diane and asks her directly: "Is this a class trip? Do you have a reservation?" Diane is silent. "Don't you know the rules? Are you a teacher?" he asks. Diane doesn't answer. More silence. I am holding my breath and thinking that if I were Diane, I would own up and beg. The children and adults are all watching Diane confront an authority who has the power to scotch the whole trip. "Are you or aren't you in charge?" he persists, by now with an unpleasant challenge in his voice. Diane looks him directly in the eye and then abruptly turns to the bus driver and says firmly: "Let's leave."
>
> The driver shuts the door and drives off. Diane directs him to a nearby corner where he drops the class in front of a different museum person who doesn't blink an eye as we get off. Still, I wonder how Diane is going to explain her abrupt treatment of the dispatcher to everyone; I know she will. She thrives on this kind of real life lesson.
>
> When we get back to school and everyone is more or less in a circle, the first thing Diane says is: "That was a wonderful trip." Pausing to let that sink in, she immediately launches into *the topic*, as if she knows that what is on my mind is on everyone else's mind as well. "We might have gone to the Brooklyn Museum, but it was closed. We might have

[7]Diane makes a point of seeing that children know how to return with their families: that they know about voluntary admission fees, how to check their coats, and where the bathrooms are located.

> gone to the Botanical Gardens, but it was raining. We might have been able to go the Natural History Museum by following all the rules. The museum is there and they like people to come to it. But we didn't have a reservation so we had to do it differently—in small groups. But when we arrived there was a dispatcher. That guy had a job to do. He had to make 100 buses fit in the right place. That was a reasonable thing, but I didn't want to talk to him right then because he didn't have time to listen to me. Had he questioned me I could have explained. So how people see the world—their frame—matters. The second guy had a different frame and he didn't start off talking to us about how we were wrong."

By seeking out another solution to parking the bus, Diane conveyed the possibility of retaining power in the face of authority. Diane drives this message home again and again, often urging children and adults to "find another way," by which she means that they should think more about getting what they want. Diane offered a spontaneous lesson in how to finesse the system: Don't lie, try to see the world from another point of view, find another way. Diane is unlikely to abandon her stance, even in the face of different cultural values.

School adults who set and legitimize boundaries of knowledge and behavior have tremendous power over children's lives. The interplay between institutional norms, individual adults' attitudes, and children's cultural backgrounds determines what happens in school and influences what children absorb. Diane wants children to be active, to feel efficacious, and to be in charge and responsible for themselves. She says, "In many cultures compliance is important; I want kids to have an option, I want them to know how to be in New York City, to have a choice." If parents' and children's values emphasize obedience, hierarchy, rules, and regulations, children face some cultural conflict when they come to PS 3. For the children who conclude that they can only stand up to authority in the company of those who feel secure within the mainstream, Diane works to counter their hesitations. Even within PS 3's "question authority" operating mode, she makes hard choices, resisting the district superintendent and the principal when she believes a stand against bureaucracy will benefit children (Mullins, 1993). By consistently challenging authority and then explaining her actions, she hopes that, over time, children in her class will learn "not to be afraid" and come to value the ability to feel more powerful and confident in this world.

Diane's Pedagogical Underpinnings

The classroom atmosphere is not wound tight because Diane regulates it carefully. Freedom from large numbers of teacher-imposed assignments give children time to get to know each other, to teach each other, and to be helpful and be helped. Underlying Diane's philosophical stance is fundamental regard for human variety, which, in her view, requires her to expand the classroom by (1) making a public, formal place for every child's perspective, not necessarily to form agreement but, as Geertz (Greene, 1995, p.

185) says, "to create a disorderly crowd of not wholly commensurable visions"; (2) exercising a thin layer of imposition—that is, relieving pressure to compete and proposing possibilities for children; (3) valuing the child's participation in the class at the level and pace that the child chooses—what Diane calls the "child's present contribution"—rather than exclusively valuing the verbal and logical mathematical skills that school traditionally demands; and (4) contextualizing content to a striking degree so that what she introduces is exceptionally close to children's interests and tied to their own initiative. She resists "the decontextualizations that falsify so much" (Greene, 1995, p. 11).

These four philosophical tenets of Diane's teaching require a classroom where, as she said in her early journal entry (12/16/80), "The central theme of my class is children living together and sharing perspectives." Absent is a notion of learning based on predetermined curriculum with sequenced skills and specified, measurable outcomes. She welcomes whoever is there in whatever state they arrive. It is enough that they are present. Growing out of this position is Diane's visceral distaste for the distant, yet ever present expectations imposed variously by society, upper-grade teachers, parents, standardized tests, and district, state, and national standards. For her, these external measures provoke ranking, competition, and elitism. They contradict the human variety she recognizes each day.

Diane's practices challenge the notion of "school." Frank Smith, author of *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, endorses a classic view of learning that is "continual, effortless, inconspicuous, boundless, unpremeditated, independent of rewards and punishment, vicarious, never forgotten, inhibited by testing, and a social activity," much of which does not seem like "school" as experienced by most adults (1998, p. 5). Diane's classroom reflects Smith's classic notion of learning. Her classroom looks less like "school" than those based on what Smith calls the "official view," where learning is "hard work, obvious, limited, dependent on rewards and punishment, based on effort, individualistic, easily forgotten, assured by testing, an intellectual activity, memorization" (p. 5).

These "official view of learning" classrooms predominate in schools in the United States. Diane's pedagogy goes against the conventional wisdom that children need predictable rules and discipline and that carefully crafted sequenced curriculum, which can be measured by standardized test scores, results in important learning. Diane is after something deeper. Her classroom is controversial. "Wild and woolly," says the current teacher across the hall, who chose Diane's classroom for her own child.[8] Not everyone agrees with Diane's values or her methods, but no one denies she has a powerful influence on the children in her charge.

[8]Norms of good classrooms differ. Nicolas Kristof (1998) wrote of his son's experience in a Japanese classroom where "so much of the responsibility is assigned to the students themselves. The saving grace [from being in school so many days a year] was a boisterous emphasis on fun in the classroom. Kids were always shouting and clowning around, with none of the discipline that people assume is drilled into them, and the student-teacher ratio was so large that the classroom was mostly on the lip of chaos" (p. 8).

The Circle on the Public Green

The circle in Diane's class is a place for children to share themselves (Fordham, 1996).[9] After addressing the parking glitch, Diane switched topics abruptly, which she often does to catch children's attention by a low-key dramatic change in tone. Because the museum trip had not been the same for everyone, she began a go-around:

> "Tell us something *really* interesting about what you saw in the museum." Luiz—large for his age with limbs that he can hardly contain while sitting on the floor—begins vaguely, "I saw that stone with all that writing." Diane says, "That is not interesting," which startles me because she rarely criticizes a child's contribution. Luiz (perhaps having learned from Diane how to stand up to authority) retorts sharply, "Just because you didn't see it. . . ," reminding everyone, even the teacher, that no one can take issue with what another person saw. Still, Diane's intervention sets a standard for more concrete, precise images.
>
> Moving around the circle, each child and adult in turn recounts what stood out. Kids describe the interactive computers, describe the operation of a hologram showing details of an anthropological dig, including a man and his skeleton. Two children dispute how a voice-activated display of gems actually works. The atmosphere is charged with interest in what has caught the attention of their peers, and the go-around is lively and energetic with a high degree of attention. Dov says with awe (and uncharacteristic conciseness): "People lived totally differently—their clothes, their coins, everything." Still, some children have other preoccupations. Mario is quietly slipping invitations to his birthday party in the park to a select group of boys. Diane, who is listening hard to each speaker, doesn't notice, and as far as I can tell, neither do the uninvited others.
>
> When the lunch bell rings, no one moves. Children are still asking each other questions, out of turn but called on by no one in charge. Jim C., who hasn't said anything, gets up unbidden to shut the door to mask noise in the hall. Six children have chosen to be silent. Later, when I name them, Diane is unconcerned; she suggests perhaps they were hungry for lunch. She knows children have had at least one protected chance to talk and be listened to, even if they rejected it on this occasion.

[9]Signithia Fordham's (1996) footnote helped me to see the connection between cultural interchange and Diane's circle when she says: "In the public school system, the only sharing that is socially approved is that which is intended to 'tell' another about the speaker's accomplishments. For example, in most elementary schools, show and tell is an obligatory component of early morning activities. Its approval, however, is not to be equated with the kind of sharing that exists among African-American people, both in and outside school. In the former case, information is shared. Among African-Americans, sharing one's sense of self is culturally approved" (p. 355).

No child's experience is "better" than another's, nor is their telling of it judged. The ways that children take in, retain, and retell information are sometimes on display in circle talk, which teachers use to figure out what children know. Diane never engages in question and answer recitations that depend on some children's good memories and facile verbal skills, making them classroom stars while excluding others from participation.[10] This class meeting was not composed of linear conversations that moved logically from point to point. Children interrupted, took issue, and pushed their own agendas. Diane did not control the discussion. Children talked to and with their peers; their comments showed that they were paying attention to each other. Kristian noticed that "Pei-Yee was scared in the dark." Joetta described "a necklace on a lady that Deborah knows about." Nilsa took issue with Kristian's description ("He said it all wrong. . . "). Diane was not the central focus, although she shared a personal memory ("When I was in college I was studying skeletons a lot. I used to walk down the street and see people in their bones, without their clothes.").[11]

Other than starting the circle off with, "Tell us something really interesting," Diane took a teacher's role only once. Samuel was silent when it was his turn. Diane said, "Tell us something that you noticed." Diane waited a full thirty seconds before asking, "Samuel, are you thinking about what to say?" After more time elapsed, Diane said neutrally, "If you listen to other people, it might spark your memory." LeShawn, on the other hand, has something to say after every contribution. "You saw that!" or "No way!" or even a muttered, "I'm glad I wasn't in that group!" Diane didn't stop this voluble child's steady stream of interjected comments. Deborah McMann neither stood out for her active participation nor for disengaging. She blended with the group.

Diane typically creates opportunities (in this case, a trip) for children to have direct experience and then puts structures in place for them to talk about their experiences with each other. She believes the experiences and the public go-around afterward develop a "class memory" of what children did together that contributes to the class-

[10]In *Common Knowledge: The Development of Understanding in the Classroom*, by Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer (1993), the authors analyze various progressive classroom lessons and show that the discourse often fails at "handing off" teachers' intended learning to the students. The authors discuss the teachers' dilemma of wanting children to construct knowledge for themselves at the same time the curriculum is predetermined by adults. They conclude that "this pedagogy discourages teachers from making explicit to children the purposes of educational activities and the criteria for success" (p. 170). Diane's pedagogy avoids these dilemmas by de-emphasizing predetermined curriculum. She responds to what arises from the children and their daily circumstances. She rarely engages in whole class lessons where the intention is for everyone to end up learning the same thing, whether by discovery or direct instruction.

[11]Diane often shares her out-of-class life in this kind of an aside. I will never know if any child will remember Diane's story of unclothed skeletons, but I suspect Diane's relationships with children are made up of such memories. In the introduction to *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned*, Jane Tompkins (1996) remembers in loving detail how her third grade teacher told us "for reasons I shall never know how her son has brought her a glass of orange juice in the shower" (p. xv). Tompkins says her education was "humiliating" and "bland cream of wheat," but she remembers vividly this story from a teacher's private life. My notes, however, never caught children's comments of this sort on the nature of their relationship with Diane. I suspect it takes an adult literary critic's reflections on her seven-year-old self to capture those moments.

room community. The emphasis was on experiences "together." No child could be excluded from discussion for not having been exposed to an activity.

Diane believes that children learn by being "in conversation with each other," that eliciting children's interests fosters participation, which propels learning—in the broadest sense (Weber, 1997). Neither "right" questions nor "right" answers controlled this post-trip circle. While Diane was unquestionably the adult authority in the room, she did not do all the telling. When children hear each other daily over one or two academic years,[12] they can, Diane insists, become increasingly more open to others. Because much class time remained in the children's hands, the atmosphere had an electrically charged feel to it. Children's interests were aroused (Dewey, 1916). Diane was not filling up empty vessels with her own taken-for-granted knowledge. Personal experience, keenly observed, was valued as knowledge.

Rules Don't Bind This Circle

The circle after the museum trip appeared to be in order. But circle time is not always so "successful" to an adult eye. Diane's self-set task is considerably more subtle than presiding over a well-managed group with a predetermined, imposed-from-the-teacher agenda. Diane is not interested in "taming"[13] children to one set of norms. Diane values interest, engagement, and participation more than external signs of decorum. Yet, on the subway, in the swimming pool, and when certain occasions demand it (a classroom guest or museum docent who turns out *not to be really interesting*), Diane insists on and gets compliance to externally imposed standards. Mostly, Diane makes decisions circumstantially: "The flow of the day comes from the energy of the kids and my reading of them" (11/11/97). The choices she makes accommodate the variation in children. From my notes (5/30/97):

> Joel comes up early from lunch—against the rules. Uncharacteristically, Diane doesn't ask him to leave. (She likes her lunchtime without children.) Instead she asks him to choose a book for her to read to the group. He chooses Judith Viorst's *My Mother Says There Are No Monsters*, etc., a picture book of a kind the class hasn't read since the early fall. He declaims with enthusiasm, "Isn't that a good book." It is not really a question. Having asked him to choose, Diane does not disagree with his choice. As the kids straggle in from lunch and join the circle, Joel is off in the corner eating a sandwich: "I forgot to take it to the lunchroom." He already knows this book and has exempted himself from the circle. Leaving the circle is not condoned behavior, but not ruled out by teacher fiat, either.

[12]The model of this multiage class is that children spend two years in the same classroom and have a chance to be both younger child and older child in the group.

[13]Seymour Sarason (1998) sums it up: "From the mid-nineteenth century on, one of the major purposes of schooling was to tame and socialize the children of immigrants. The modal American classroom is still a place where, rhetoric aside, students are objects to be tamed and socialized" (p. 11).

During this time slot, Diane usually reads aloud. Today she reads a page and then, in an unusual move, asks Alyssa (who is listening intently) to read the next page, and then Jeremy reads, and then others read. There is no predetermined order or routine; it just happens. Public oral reading by children is not a usual activity in this class, and it engages about half of them. Those who stay with the story move closer and closer to Diane and each other until they are no longer in any semblance of a circle, but gathered in a tight group touching each other. The others silently drift away to draw, play chess, find their own activities. Although this exodus is not usual, Diane makes no effort to bring them back.

The classroom intercom breaks the rhythm of the read aloud. Joetta answers and says, "It's about the attendance," which had been forgotten in the wake of a morning dance class. Diane asks Joetta and Lee to "take charge." They leave the reading group to find the sheet and then they write in pen before they remember that the machine won't scan ink. They write over it in pencil and leave for the office. Just as the group refocuses, Joetta and Lee return from the office to report their pencil-and-ink effort has been rejected. They have another sheet to complete in pencil. All this commotion has drawn attention to the attendance, even though the reading aloud still interests this increasingly small group.

In the midst of this focus on attendance, the bus passes arrive. (Did I catch the secretary out of the corner of my eye also fetching the corrected attendance sheet with a big sigh?) The secretary gives eligible kids new magnetic Metro Cards that replace old bus passes. Luiz looks up from his drawing and his face registers that he is *really* interested. LeShawn is waving his card in Mario's face. Diane abruptly signals LeShawn to give the pass to her. His expression shows he doesn't think Diane really means it, but she makes it clear she does with a dramatic large hand gesture that convinces him to hand it over. She has distracted LeShawn from annoying Mario and now holds up LeShawn's new monthly card. In one of her abrupt shifts, Diane asks kids to figure out the card's monetary value, how many school days, how many back and forth trips, how much cost per trip. A group is totally with her; it is now the oral readers who drift off to find their own engaging activities.

In this circle, the interruptions bothered Diane not at all.[14] She proceeded as if children who were listening were having a meeting and those who were not were perfectly right in finding something else to do. She responded to the disruptions as a minor but necessary annoyance, since the attendance task obviously took precedence, "just like doing laundry." The record-keeping responsibility belonged not to her, but to the group. Diane was pleased that everyone was involved, even if not at the same

[14]While each member of our team collected data individually, we attempted to broaden our own perspectives and make ourselves aware of our own blinders by making cross-site visits. Jianzhong Xu, a teammate, was there that day. He observed the "destructive" intrusion of the attendance and observed correctly that "Diane only engaged half the kids in the reading aloud." He wondered "what would Joel's father have said if he knew how Joel spent his time during that circle."

time. She valued the rare opportunity, the "intimate moment," for the readers to read aloud publicly. She was unconcerned that the others (including Joel) skipped reading the monster book aloud and was pleased that they (including Joel) relished the oral math. As usual, Diane and the children negotiated the terms of what has happened. She did not insist on compliance, thus pushing children to become authorities on their own needs. "Besides," she believes, "loose activity supports kids' natural rhythms" (9/16/97).

The circle in Room 307 rarely looks like other meeting time circles in classrooms across America. Adults may be much more comfortable if they see children conforming to familiar rules and norms.[15] In Diane's class, the absence of the usual controls means that the circle often can—to adult eyes—look ragged, loose, chaotic, and in need of an adult authority. Parents and other adults see Diane's circle and wonder.[16] Here, said a parent in her child's second year with Diane, "The children own this circle" (10/27/97). That ownership is Diane's intention.[17]

This absence of behavioral guidelines is not a matter of classroom management or craft. There is no doubt that Diane is the ultimate authority in the room.[18] She is explicit about why she does not make rules for the circle:

[15]Again, norms are not all the same to all observers. In Elijah Anderson's (1990) ethnography, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, he tells of watching "apparently unsupervised" children three to six years of age playing in an intersection from 11:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. "After much reflection I concluded that, far from being unsupervised, these children had been supervising themselves, not in a manner appreciated by middle-class people, but in a way that ensures some protection for the youngest. What appeared to be a hierarchy of supervision revealed itself whenever danger approached. For instance, it was up to an older child to watch out for a younger one when a call pulled up to the stop sign" (pp. 156–57). I am suggesting that, like Anderson's eventual conclusions, Diane's circle lends itself to interpretations other than "unsupervised."

[16]See also Bowers and Flinders (1991) on the "Origins and Assumptions of the Management Paradigm" (pp. 5–14), which outlines the reduction of everything about classrooms and teachers to "improving prediction, control and efficiency" (p. 5). Diane resists that "technicist" thinking.

[17]See *The Classroom Crucible*, by Edward Pauly (1991), for an interesting discussion of power in the classroom (pp. 50–75), which acknowledges that children and adults have reciprocal power to subtly or not so subtly shape what happens in classrooms by their ability to withhold, cooperate, or just be themselves in a group. Teachers already know this, at least implicitly. Pauly's contribution is to remind policymakers that policies do not work when these classroom-level dynamics are unaccounted for or when people in authority pretend these dynamics don't exist. I am moving the microscope closer by looking at how an individual teacher's intentional redistribution of her power among children shapes the classroom.

[18]In a section entitled "The Cultural Clash Between Students and School," Lisa Delpit (1992) points out that many middle-class European-American teachers use indirect commands and downplay the display of their own power, much to the detriment of African-American children. The mostly male children respond to these teachers as "*boring*. . . I don't know nothin' unless she tells me." Delpit goes on to say that "African American boys exhibit a high degree of physicality and desire for interaction, which they initiate," expressions of which are likely to "receive negative sanction in the classroom setting." But, she says, "a classroom that allows for greater movement and interaction will better facilitate the learning and social styles of African American boys" (p. 239). I am putting up for discussion whether the absence of a display of personal power necessarily results in "*boring*" classes if it comes with more movement and active engagement. I am also raising for discussion whether the overt exercise of a teacher's power sometimes goes along with a desire to keep tighter control of movement. There are complicated issues that deserve extended conversation.

> How will kids know what their contribution to group life is if I make the rules? I need to see how the kids are without my rules; that is how I get to know them, what their preferences are, and what their tolerance for group life is. (10/10 /96)

> If kids only follow rules that I make and enforce, what they learn is to be quiet and fold their hands and they don't know what is their contribution. . . . I hope I am strong enough to resist being the one who makes the rules. I am only one of many. (10/14/97)

> Full attention occurs when children are *really, really* interested. If at least three children are "interested," I keep the circle going so as not to disappoint the child who has the floor. (10/11/98)

> How are people going to raise families, to be in charge of themselves, if they don't learn to be self-directed? (5/19/97)

When children surreptitiously bring a book to the circle and Diane gestures them to shut it, sometimes they do, but I have seen many examples of children continuing to read. Diane says:

> I never make kids close their books. I don't want them to have anyone's voice in their head with that message. And how can I ask kids to shut their books, when they are so engaged in reading that they bring their books to the circle? (4/6/97)

Diane also says, "Kids' attention is an issue of civility to each other, not of my response" (1/15/97). For some children, in some circumstances, Diane does allow civility to takes a second place to reading. Diane says, "It depends on the kid and on the circumstance."

"This isn't a circle," Luiz commented on the first day of school, referring to the ragged oval in the awkward space. Diane said, "Well, this is what we've got." In this first meeting of the year, Diane sets patterns that will repeat for the entire school year. "This is what we've got" conveys exactly Diane's emphasis on the present, on the need to adapt to who is here and to the space available in this small classroom. In a decade and a half, the circle has not changed, except that it always expands to include who is there. To my questions (no longer quite so argumentative), Diane replies that her reluctance to impose rules allows every person in the room to belong and to make a contribution.[19] I have come to see how this public space exemplifying Diane's unconflicted and enduring values is a basic vehicle for making a place for every child. Individuals—whoever is present—occupy a large place in her pedagogi-

[19] The following exchange is typical of what Diane means. From my notes of October 10, 1996:
Diane: I want to know why Luiz and LeShawn aren't doing something about those three people who are making noise?
Dov: Joel was trying to poke someone's skin with a pencil.
Diane (annoyed): And couldn't you stop it? Couldn't you take the pencil (gestures to Mike's hand) and say, "Stop it, someone's reading." That's your job.

cal scheme, yet it is the living together and sharing perspectives that builds the classroom community. Diane engineers the dynamics of this public terrain to support children finding their place. The moveable boundary of the circle expanded to include even Joel, who was in the corner eating his lunch. He was part of the class by having chosen the book.

Oral sharing in the circle is part of what Diane brings to the classroom, which raises the legitimate question of whether, for some children, this exercise is culturally easier than for others.[20] Although Diane was willing to wait for children not to be "shy," there was an obligation to participate in the circle. Diane accepted a range of individual rhythms, verbal styles, and interests, but she valued openness. She wanted children to feel they could share with the group, talk to each other rather than back and forth to the teacher, or to remain consistently silent. While she did not insist that children contribute before they were ready, Diane had less tolerance for Samuel's nonparticipation—more a matter of his temperament than his multiracial African-American/European-American background—than for LeShawn's interjections, which may in fact be culturally appropriate in his African-American house or church.[21] ("LeShawn's medium for learning is talk," she reminded me.) She says: "If you have found your voice you can be quiet, but if you haven't, you should be able to learn to speak up. That is hard." For some children in her classroom, the cultural practice of learning to share openly in public is a demanding task, one that has to be learned to gain competent membership in the community (Calderwood, 1998).

For some children, being quiet must be learned. Diane consistently stopped children from contributing too much. After the trip to the Natural History Museum, Dov was self-restrained in displaying his expertise, but on occasions when his unstoppable verbal acrobatics overwhelm the group, Diane insists he leave the circle. The struggle with

[20]In McGoldrick et. al. (1996), there is a section on the value that different cultures place on talk (p. 11). In Jewish culture, "articulating one's experience may be as important as the experience itself." In Sioux Indian culture, "Talking is actually proscribed in certain family relationships. A woman who has never exchanged a single word with her father-in-law may experience deep intimacy with him, a relationship that is almost inconceivable in our pragmatic world." Although Diane's mother was Jewish, talk in Diane's family was not the intense talk of some Jewish families. "It was a quiet house," Diane says.

[21]Olga Winbush ("Who has to Change? African-American Oral Traditions in Multicultural Classrooms," 1993, pp. 13-16) argues strongly for a change in classrooms so that African-American children will have a place. White teachers, she says, do not have the opportunity to see Black verbal patterns at home because in public, children are expected to maintain well-behaved, mannerly, polite personas. Thus, teachers often insist on silence and one-at-a-time speakers and do not allow time for children to exclaim spontaneously. The children's verbal patterns get them in trouble.

Or, I would add, their verbal patterns contribute to a lack of self-confidence because they cannot bring their whole selves to school. Theresa Perry (Swap, *Developing Home-School Partnerships*, 1993, pp. 113) writes, "For the African American child, the issue is not simply the amount of cultural capital, but also the fluency in those dispositions that allow the child to be viewed as teachable, ready to learn: the ability to be reserved, to subordinate emotions and affections to reason, to constrain physical activity, to represent a disciplined exterior. What complicates the picture even further is that these modes of behavior all reside in the domain of participation, with the possibility that constraining behavior in these areas could possibly constrain participation and investment in school."

Dov over his circle habits was her single most draining issue of the year. She worked hard at getting him to appreciate that "others knew things too." That she allows no verbally facile "stars" to dominate is consistent with rejecting ability groupings and competitive arenas for children to demonstrate that some children are "better" than other children. She is especially incensed when schools undervalue children without those verbal skills.

Creating Space in the Circle For Emotional Growth

The teasing began underground—after school, at recess, on the playground. Samuel called Joel "Shorty" over and over again. Samuel's teasing was acute observation at work, an unerring sense of the conforming code that size mattered to Joel. He was intensely vulnerable to teasing about height; his maternal grandfather was well under five feet tall, and Joel had always been the smallest person in his class. At the Brooklyn Museum (6/12/97), caught by chance, accidentally, on my tape recorder, I hear Samuel taunting Joel, "Shorty, Shorty, Shorty," in a relentless voice, like picking at a scab that never heals. Joel threatens: "I'll punch you out." He is really angry and tired from the morning swim. Diane intervenes and says to Samuel: "You are really lucky that I didn't let Joel do what he said he would." The class misses the elevator while they watch Diane resolve this exchange.

Joel excels at what I call "doorway exclamatory." Coming up (late) after lunch, Joel bursts on the scene—he stops at the classroom door, casts his eyes on his classmates convened in a circle, and informs them: "There's a smoke bomb in the lunchroom!" Or he arrives at the doorway wide-eyed, registers the class in a meeting and exclaims, "I left my book bag in the lunchroom," turns on his heel to retrieve his shirt, his jacket, his book bag, his toy, whatever he has left behind in the art room, the gym, the yard, the auditorium. In this mode, his body is on high alert, and he draws all the attention to himself.

Joel also excels at deep engagement. He uses his graceful body well, maneuvering into spaces other children cannot, curling himself up and appearing smaller than he actually is. As if in camouflage, he can hide under tables and in corners, totally engrossing himself in *Tintin* or *Dinotopia*, oblivious to the rest of the class and he to them. In this mode, his body is still as a rock, and his pleasurable immersion in self-chosen solitary activity—drawing, reading, thinking—is obvious to any adult onlooker. Until he wants to say something. Then he is on full alert again, engaging the entire class in what he has to say. Joel can collect an audience (even me) to watch him interact with a computer game screen while he provides a running commentary on the action, replete with odd sound effects. Perhaps his fast pacing and intense interest hold us. Or he can be pensively still at the computer keyboard, assuming a ghostlike status; during this activity, for him, the outside world ceases. After expending all of this high energy, he can be tired. Sometimes he falls sound asleep in the middle of the classroom. He is independent, but as Diane notes, "not yet interdependent." By that, she means he can take or leave the class. He is not central to the circle, except when he chooses to be. Perhaps his classmate Samuel sensed the distance.

The day after the Brooklyn Museum trip, the weather is hot and humid. Diane is worn and irritable—it is the year anniversary of her major cancer surgery. Many kids have not done their writing. The air feels heavy, almost foreboding. I leave.[22] When I return twenty minutes later, the children are discussing the moral implications of the exchange of blows they have just witnessed. With one-hundred percent attention to each other in the circle, they are deeply engaged. From my notes (6/13/97):

Diane: Samuel called Joel shorty again and Joel did what he said he would do. I had the right to stop it, but I didn't. Joel carried out his threat against Samuel. When I said, "Cut," Joel stopped.

Luiz: Why were you fighting?

Samuel: I don't remember.

Several kids: But it just happened.

Samuel: We were fighting because I kept bothering him. . . .

Diane: I am sure when Samuel has some time he will get the words.

Joel: I didn't wanna hurt him. I just lost my temper. I couldn't control myself. Something was pulling on me. Like my brain was going. . . losing its cells. I feel BAD. I didn't want to do that. I just lost my mind somehow. And I think Samuel learned his lesson. . . . I think Samuel learned his lesson. (Pause for breathing) From now on he'll listen. . . . When I heard him I kept crying about it. Samuel was crying because he was hurt. I cried too because I didn't want to hurt him. That's what is the sad part. I went to go get a drink of water and I thought about what I did. Then I totally did some research (softer) in my head, my mind. So I think I will take him to the nurse to put a patch on his eye.

Ramon: Sometimes when you try to control your temper, you get so emotional and some people, they can't really take it. Some people can take it and they don't hear when other people say something that hurts their feelings.

[22]Diane and I disagree about what happened next, and neither my notes nor my memory are reliable on why I left. I remember that something in the air forced me to say I was going out to get a sandwich for lunch. I never did that during class time, but I vaguely remember feeling like I needed some fresh air or relief from something. Diane remembers she asked me to get some frozen fruit juice bars for the class—something she never asks of me, nor does she provide that kind of treat for kids. However, last year on her last day, before she left for surgery, she and the kids had Frozfruits together to mark her leaving. She told them she wanted to mark the anniversary with the same ritual of eating treats together. In any case, I left to get fresh air, a sandwich, and Frozfruits. Diane remembers that she could feel Joel about to explode, and she didn't want me there recording it. While Diane often signals to me, "get ready to type," when she is about to face some issue head on with a small group of kids, she does not like me recording things that are out of control. She does not mind the out of control part or that I know about them or use them—but she doesn't like the sight of me calmly recording in those circumstances. She remembers asking me to leave because what was about to happen had to happen in the family—like home, without guests.

Tero: Sometimes you have a temper tantrum and you can't control your body.

Diane: That is when younger kids lose their temper. . . .

Joel: I have three tempers: my fake temper, my half-real, my half-fake temper, and my very real temper. That's the temper I just lost.

Sal: It is especially hard to keep your temper when you are a kid. Sometimes kids just have to let it out.

Mario: Sometimes Samuel triggers that kind of stuff.

Diane: We all know who triggers things around us. We can ignore them or we can try to grow them (Diane's word for helping them move beyond), like help them learn to respond in a different way. Joel did something he didn't want to do.

A few kids interject that he didn't have a choice. (Joel's mother arrives and joins the circle.)

Diane: Joel was a good teacher. Maybe all of us can learn what happens when someone says "Shorty" after being asked to stop.

Sal: Joel had the right to do that.

Pei-Yee: Is Samuel right or Joel right?

Diane: What do you think? (Kids wait for Pei-Yee to gather her thoughts in English.)

Pei-Yee: Joel is right. Some people get mad if people call you things like dumb. (To Samuel) Do you feel in trouble with yourself?

Samuel: "Yes."

At lunch with the adults, Diane applauded Joel's "eloquence." She was pleased that "he reaffirmed that we are all in the family because no one attacked Samuel and that no one cheered on the fight." Joel's mother—called by Joel before the circle convened—had come from work "as fast as I could to comfort my son because he couldn't control his temper." She agreed with Diane: "I was so glad Joel didn't gloat over how he got Samuel and that he was really disturbed about what happened. I was proud of him for defending himself. Standing up physically for one's honor is a cultural value (Berber) in this household—another story worth telling, but not here.

Two important points matter about this circle. Without the looseness, no such intimacy would exist. A tightly wound atmosphere would prevent the kind of personal questioning and resolution that this fight provoked. It was not Diane, but the children, who decided "Is Samuel right or is Joel right?" All year, Diane was the hidden hand structuring a classroom that could support this kind of intimate talk around a typical classroom skirmish handled in an atypical way. One can question whose cultural values this incident serves. Joel and his family trusted Diane, and Diane trusted that she was doing the right thing. "Maybe Joel won't have to punch someone out ever again," Diane said. Both Diane and Joel's mother felt this opportunity to

respond physically to teasing in a safe surrounding was important for Joel's growth. Samuel had to face that his continued inability to hear Joel and to heed his clear warning was responsible for pushing Joel over the edge. It was a learning experience for Samuel as well.

Diane violated the usual mainstream school norms ("use words, not fists") in honoring Joel's home cultural values in the classroom. Easing this well-established home-school barrier can only happen when family and teacher trust each other.

Diane wants children to stand tall, not speak under their breath, be able to exercise options, question authority, find their own place, and take on responsibility for themselves. She also wants children to feel "entangled, and not autonomous," as Maxine Greene says (lecture notes, 10/7/96). Diane engenders the attitude that we are all in this classroom/world together. Her moveable boundaries are determined by who is present, by her autonomy—without which she could not be responsive—and by her willingness to accept children however they arrive in her classroom. Children and their families come to belong to a classroom community that expands to include everyone. Diane's ability to see individual children, coupled with her commitment to ease school for marginalized children by distributing power to act, ensures that the power to speak in the classroom is equalized and reciprocal, and that children come to know that their voices will be heard. While Diane does not center her classroom around the concept of cultural interchange, her practice promotes it.

CHAPTER

3

Questions About Thinking in Racial and Ethnic "Types"

> *"To move, then, from the particularities to wider and wider graspings is, in part, a matter of looking through more and more particularities, to discover in others' questions and visions more and more ways of transcending one-dimensional grasping.*
>
> *Maxine Greene (1995, p. 69)*

Diane responded to individuals by giving extra conference time to the guardian of a previously home-schooled child whose single mother had just died. She nurtured Kristian and his parent through an eviction hearing, and confronted the children who teased a cross-dressing father—all functions she regarded as part of her role as a teacher. Her point was that she saw individuals as individuals whatever their life circumstances, but their cultural differences were not the center of her focus.

My Questions/Another Teacher's Classroom

Diane has an unconflicted aversion to "thinking in types"—indeed she is opposed to anything that categorizes children. For Diane, race and ethnicity matter—she is not color blind (Schofield, 1986)—but she believes human variations matter differently to different children. Her highest priority is responding to what the children bring. Society's categorical imposition of "worse than" or "better than" judgments about individuals based on race, ethnicity, and power makes her angry (Pinderhughes, 1989). Nonetheless, I am raising the question: How can teachers see the child before them and still keep a child's cultural background prominently in view, especially when the cultural elements are either invisible (like religion) or all too visible (like skin color)? I believe teaching practices and school structures that "type" some children risk sensationalizing their daily lives, especially when students and their families do not fit easily into the

mainstream middle class culture.[23] Yet the habit of *not* "thinking in types" may lead to ignoring certain signals about a child's family that might be helpful in school. Teasing out what is gained and lost by "thinking in types" is one of my persistent occupations. Given children's young ages in second/third grade, should their teachers bring up race or ethnicity if the children do not? One may disagree with the details of Diane's practice as I have described them, but posing questions about "thinking in types" brings dilemmas to the surface for discussion.

Diane took a strong stand: "Cultural interchange," she said, "is human interchange. It happens wherever people are together." That is not to say it happens naturally in classrooms; cultural interchange in pluralistic educational settings depends on adults taking responsibility, but what is it the adults should do?

What Happened to Talk About Race and Ethnicity?

Old ways of thinking judged assimilation best. Newer possibilities for a multiracial/multicultural democracy—admittedly "utopian" (Perry and Fraser, 1993, p. 20)—require digging deep into complex and contradictory assumptions about daily classroom life. Since treatment by the larger society is highly charged with judgments about skin color—the highest privilege accrues to people with the lightest skin, and darker-skinned children face insidious barriers of institutional and societal racism—running a classroom requires thinking about race and ethnicity. Children in Diane's class came from so many cultures that ascertaining who was "White" provoked hard thinking and confounded the numerical categories disseminated by the Board of Education forms. In this classroom, children's skin colors varied (transracial adoption, intermarriage, genetics) and were not necessarily connected to parents' visible ethnic heritages. Even though no one racial or ethnic group predominated, and multiracial families were the norm, I expected race and ethnicity to stand out in the classroom more prominently than it did. Although Diane and I listened carefully for children to offer signs that skin color and ethnic heritages were on their minds, and we watched for the charged conversation that often makes adults uncomfortable, I rarely heard the intense responses to the racial observations and exclusion that I remembered from middle school (Jervis, 1996).

When a child's questions came to the surface, Diane did not hesitate to act, but she left unvoiced topics alone. From my notes, 6/19/97:

> It is Tuesday morning and the class is at their weekly swimming session at the local pool. In the girls' locker room is an African-American

[23]By "White," I mean that position intertwined with privilege, rather than the more specific European-American designation. By "sensationalize," I mean, for instance, that wide-eyed response of a White middle-class person who focuses on jail or drugs or who ignores or downplays family strengths. "Sensationalizing" can cause the observer to fail to appreciate that children's daily lives are what they are, and an outsider's interpretation and overreaction is not helpful. Another aspect of sensationalizing is when Whites overreact to a person of color: "You're so articulate" or "You speak so well," as if their speaking standard English well is an out-of-the-ordinary accomplishment.

> woman wanting to interact with the kids. I am engrossed in my own clothes-changing agenda, and Diane alerts me to pay attention because she knows I would be interested. I hear a woman asking multiracial Mirasol, whose hair is braided in corn rows: "Who is Black in your family? Who is White? Do you ever wear your hair out?" Mirasol looks this woman directly in the eye, and answers, "Sometimes." The woman keeps on: "But I bet it is nappy and you don't like to comb it." Mirasol maintains respectful eye contact, but draws her body away.

Whether Mirasol wanted to talk about hair to any adult was not clear. Diane and I already knew Mirasol was uneasy about her hair. Days after Mirasol's White mother had left town after separating from her African-American husband, Mirasol came to school with her hair braided in corn rows for the first time. Then she wore a heavy knit cap that covered her whole head of braids, refusing to take it off *ever*, despite the fact (not the rule) that no one wore hats in class, that the room was often overheated, and that for several weeks the hat prevented her from joining the class at swimming. When her father mentioned the hat at the parent conference, Diane speculated that perhaps "the hat is helping Mirasol keep her life together. . . like a lid." I wondered later whether Mirasol or her father considered Diane's whiteness a disqualifier for hair discussion, and I speculated that Diane had not wanted to broach the subject because it might be seen as awkward. Diane acknowledged it had not occurred to her to suggest any racial interpretations to Mirasol or her father.

Later, Mirasol told Deborah, who is Black, who told me (4/14/97), in answer to my direct question: "Mirasol didn't like the way her scalp showed." Plausible. Diane heard Mirasol's unhappiness and safeguarded her hat-wearing, but she did not filter any of what happened through a racial lens. Mirasol visibly needed (and got) support from Diane at this tender time in her life, but whether introducing a conversation about her Black hairstyle would have released Mirasol's discomfort or been an intrusion is not so easily answered.[24]

Despite the infrequency of children's spontaneous mention of race, children were attuned to skin color. When I asked a group of multiracial children whose mother I would be at a "pretend" birthday party, they knew immediately whose skin color matched mine. Asked a direct question by me about who had skin the same color as his, Joel answered precisely, noting children in other classes whose names he did not know. But he and others rarely, if ever, brought talk to class of differences in hair, skin color, language, or accents. Although Diane created time and opportunity for children to make themselves and their thinking known, she did not introduce these topics. Yet

[24]African-American readers respond strongly to this vignette. For instance, "Children of color cannot feel truly valued if the teacher avoids introducing racial topics. All children are strengthened when they are helped to sort out and articulate their unspoken feelings about the diversity of their world," wrote one reader. Another African-American colleague suggests that because children of color are subject to such devastating attacks by the media, where they are entirely absent except in subservient, devalued roles, teachers must initiate discussion about appearance. White readers, on the other hand, often do not single out this incident for comment. (Typically, it is in the margins, like this footnote, that many of the should-race-be-at-the-center conversations currently take place.)

comparison talk was everywhere. Children constantly compared physical attributes related to size. Talk about height, foot length, hand span, ear size, and hair length (especially related to gender) was often charged with feeling. Comparative scatology was a popular topic ("poo-gas," farting). Comparative family configurations—who lived with whom, how half-siblings came to be ("my father was with her before my mother"), and siblings for a short time ("my brothers who used to live with me") went with the divorce, separation, and relationship talk.

Who Am I?

That the question of race did not stand out for the children was confirmed when, in March, Diane asked children to write a paragraph on "I am..." and read it aloud. Diane gave no hints of how to go about this task—which I thought was excruciatingly hard and said so inadvertently with my body language. My atypical overresponsiveness prompted Diane to comment on it the next day in the circle before she posted my typed copy of their writing (3/11/97):

> I could tell from Kathe's response that it was a hard thing I asked you to do. I didn't give you any direction—which is especially hard—because I wanted you to find your own direction and describe yourself so that when you read these papers, you will see that you are both different from each other and the same. I don't know how you all felt about it, but the writing showed you did some good work.

Of twenty-five papers, only Linda (Latina) mentioned skin color. In a short contribution, which she struggled to make legible, she wrote, "I have brown eyes and brown hair and white skin and white nails." More typically, children described their eye color (eight did), which only adults would see as a code word for race when children's eyes are not brown. Luke (White) began: "I am Luke. I like soccer, baseball, basketball and football, too. I have blue eyes and blond hair...." Lucy (White), the only other child who did not have brown eyes, wrote among other things, " I have three colors in my eyes: blue, yellow, and green...." Allysa (Middle-eastern father, White-American mother) wrote, "I am different from Lucy because she has blue and green and yellow eyes...." An African-American boy began: "I am a kid who has two feet, two arms, one head and my name is Daniel...." Another African-American boy wrote, "I'm LaShawn. I like drawing Spiderman, X-men, batman. I am good at running. I am good at relay racing. I am good at doing backflips." Joetta (Latina) wrote, "Hi. My name is Joetta. I love to play. I have brown eyes. I am OK at kickball and I'm great at climbing trees."

The entire set of papers conveyed optimism, enthusiasm, and energy for school and life as children detailed what they liked and what they were good at doing. Five children (including Joel) described themselves as either a kid, a human being, or a person. Here is a characteristic contribution from multiracial Joel:

> I am a human being. I am someone who does things. I am someone who is healthy. I am 7 years old. I read a lot. I write a lot. I even do my homework a lot. My class is on the 3rd floor of PS 3. My name is Joel.

> I am interested in geography. I like playing and I never give up hope. I am good at math and I read a lot. I help my mom do dishes. Sometimes I have to set the table.

Mirasol wrote:

> I'm 8 years old. I have two sisters and one brother. I live in New York. I have lots of friends. I enjoy kickball, talking, and shopping. The things I like to shop for are stationery, shoes, bags, and clothes. I go to PS 3. The class I'm in is Diane's. In school I enjoy math, recess and talking. I live with my dad, my brother and with my sister. At home I enjoy playing on the computer, talking on the phone, and practicing gymnastics. . . .

Then she launched into a long description of her half-sisters and their half-siblings, where in the United States they lived, and how often she saw them. She ended with a description of her favorite movies and songs. While the location of her recently separated family was clearly on her mind, race and ethnicity were not at the center of Mirasol's thought.

Race and ethnicity were not first and foremost in Diane's thinking. Is she operating from innocence or knowledge (Audrey Thompson, 1998)? The relative absence of spontaneous talk about race may be the consequence of Diane's pedagogical choice to listen to children; she dwelt on few—if any—topics that children did not initiate. Or perhaps her aversion to thinking in types rubbed off on children and, rather than silencing them, she allowed them to see each other without resorting to comparative racial and ethnic categories?[25] There are alternative explanations. If children see numerous others around them who are different, they are less likely to see themselves in terms of a single characteristic that sets them off as distinct. The majority of children did not belong to one ethnic or racial group, so individuals did not bump up against differences that required them to see their ethnicity as salient. They lacked the sharp lines and simple divisions that could seize their attentions and shape their conceptions of self. Or, coming back to the teacher, perhaps Diane's whiteness kept children's questions underground, and these children might have felt safer risking discussion of race with a teacher of color (Delpit, 1990). How does a teacher promote the soundest self?

How can teachers resolve this complex dilemma to promote learning and ensure that *all* children feel they belong in schools? Pedagogical variables confound the issue. I had the chance to see the class exposed to a more direct teaching style about ethnicity, when twice weekly during Diane's prep period, the teacher read quality mul-

[25]See Diane Hoffman (1998). In her article, "A Therapeutic Moment: Identity, Self, and Culture," Hoffman asks, "Need one insist on a separate psychology for every distinctive ethnic group?. . . The task would seem to be negotiating borderlands. . . where neither excessive generalization nor particularism accurately captures the nature of social life" (p. 329). I am asking, what does that perspective look like in practice?

ticultural literature to the class. She highlighted individual children ("Joel, I bet you know this folk tale because your mother is Moroccan") and taught by moral fiat ("You must sit cross-legged in the circle or you aren't part of us"). Her spotlighting children when they were not necessarily receptive to being on public display, and her insistence on rigid discipline, replete with offender's names on the blackboard, came to little good. Although the academic stars answered her recitation questions, children gave her generalized grief and she filled up so much space herself that no discussion of the sensitive facets of race or ethnicity took place in her class.

A further complication in discussing race is that White teachers can stumble when they take on racially loaded topics. A dispute was in the news recently: A White teacher read her third grade class *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron (1997), a book about a Black girl with "the kinkiest, the nappiest, the fuzziest, the most screwed up, squeezed up, knotted up, twisted up hair." A parent protested, leading to community infighting, verbal threats, and reassignment of the teacher to another school. According to the press, the teacher sought to "help black children feel good about their hair." The parent retorted, "Who said my child had problems with her hair?" ("Unswayed by Debate on Children's Book," 1998). Overlay these two opposite understandings with Jill Nelson's Op Ed article in the *New York Times* (1998), "Stumbling Upon a Race Secret": "[The teacher] may have been armed with good intentions, but in using *Nappy Hair* in the classroom. . . this young woman had no inkling that sometimes barriers to that self-esteem are perpetuated not by the white community but by the black one." The teacher "inadvertently exposed both the depth and absurdity of a race secret."

The take-home lesson: White teachers talk with children about racial topics at each other's peril. Diane's response to the above news item assumed that a child in the teacher's class *must* have had a question about hair or the teacher never would have chosen that book, "otherwise. . . ," and her voice trailed off to nothing. If teachers honor children's questions with careful attention rather than assume them, such incidents as this might not ignite. But what's a teacher to do? In most schools, including Diane's, forums for working out answers do not exist.

How Deep Should Social Critique Be in Second/Third Grade?

While Diane did not take up a discussion about hair with Mirasol, she did address the discomfort she sensed in the locker room. While she was dressing, Diane purposely initiated a conversation with the woman who interrogated Marisol so she could have a conversation with the girls later on. From my notes that same day:

> After swimming the class goes to the park, and without explanation, Diane stops everyone at the playground gate and gestures some kids to enter ("in," she says dramatically) and others she motions to the park bench ("out"). Boys, it happens, are "in" and girls are "out." Diane sits down in the middle of the bench and girls wait for Diane to begin. No one has a clue what this is going to be about.

> Diane begins softly, "There was a woman in the locker room named Gayle. G-a-y-l-e. "A teacher at PS 3?" someone asks. "No, she went to the school across the street," and Diane points to it. For a change, Diane poses a question:
>
> Diane: Where do you think she lives?
>
> Liza: She said she lives in heaven, that she lives in God's house.
>
> Deborah: That's ridiculous. Where does she really live?
>
> Mirasol: She's homeless.
>
> There is a long pause while children take in the magnitude of that revelation.
>
> Liza: But she was in her bra. You don't meet people in your bra.
>
> Diane: Well, she doesn't have a place to wash like you do and she was getting herself together. You know, she has a mother and a grandmother. . . .
>
> Nell: Why doesn't she live with them?
>
> Kids list reasons: "There is no room. . . she ran away. . . they had a fight."
>
> Diane: So maybe she lives here one night and somewhere else the next night. Go play.

Diane has created a context to treat Gayle as a person with a family, a name, a school, and a need to be clean and "together."

Diane did not end there. In the locker room, she had overheard Liza (Latina) whispering conspiratorially to Deborah (African-Caribbean) about Gayle in a tone she found distressing. Diane addressed Liza privately with "a quiet punch in the belly" (Diane's phrase for startling someone) so Liza would see Gayle in a new light and begin to reconsider her own taunting behavior and insulting tone. Diane began:

> So I met a person, Gayle, who said, "The smart one told the other one what to say," and I said to her, "All my kids are smart." Gayle said, "No, I mean smart ass." Diane pauses to let Liza take in that Gayle had seen her behavior as smart ass.
>
> Liza understands that she is being asked to account for herself: "I was just getting dressed. I didn't want her to touch my bathing suit and she wanted to rinse it out for me."
>
> Diane: "You were making fun of her and you embarrassed her, but because Gayle likes kids and is the daughter of a teacher, she told me."
>
> Liza persists: "But she was touching my stuff. She put my bathing suit in a bag."

> Diane answers, "I thought she was taking care of us. She asked me about my suit in the sink. If you didn't like her touching your things, at least you didn't have to make fun of her. You hurt people sometimes. And you get people in trouble. If you want to ask a question, then ask it, but don't have other people ask your questions for you."

Diane does not run a classroom where children analyze systemic injustice through teacher-introduced curriculum, sometimes called a "critical pedagogy" classroom, where the emphasis is on critiquing the status quo to achieve a more just world. Rather, she makes use of what actually happens and follows the children's leads. Although she confronted Liza directly about her teasing tone, Diane's discussion with the girls was short and relatively undidactic; she did not prompt children to address homelessness as a social issue, but had any child shown a spark of interest, I suspect that Diane would have instantly offered support.

Diane believes that what has no meaning for a child amounts to nothing. A student of Maxine Greene, she agrees with Greene (1995) that disconnected critique can press practitioners toward manipulation and compulsion: "They may intervene from without in accord with standards that seem better than (or higher than) those prevailing in the society at hand; they may coerce and even demean" (p. 62). Diane is unwilling to use her power to push an adult social agenda. This is not to say that she never does something startling to disrupt the status quo. For instance (my notes of 5/13/97), she suddenly asked all of the children to leave the room and return to the circle without sitting in same-sex groups, but she does it without extended discussion. "Kids get the point of the gesture," she says.

When the direction comes from a child, Diane moves fast. One day in early September, Mirasol suggested that instead of every child bringing a personal snack, each day three different children could bring a healthy snack for the whole group. Diane threw the full weight of her authority into supporting Marisol's idea of daily communal snack. She helped children form planning committees, design monthly calendars, and resolve snags. From the moment of Mirasol's suggestion, three families each day provided the snack. I predict communal snack—which fits Diane's values exactly—will be a permanent feature in her class for years to come.

Diane helped Dov master his anger about Mayor Giuliani's threat to take away a local soccer field and channel it into a protest by organizing a classroom letter-writing campaign and then a school-wide petition. She supported several outraged class members who wanted to lobby the principal when the computer teacher was fired. Not for Diane, however, is the concerted effort made by Mrs. Pat, a second grade teacher described by Shirley Brice Heath (1983, pp. 327–334), who planned for her class to become ethnographers ("detectives") in the summer. Their production of "staggering" numbers of records of diverse language usage would only have happened in Diane's classroom if the children themselves became interested in varieties of literacy.

When preparing for a visit to the New York Historical Society exhibit about people on the Underground Railroad who settled on the land that is now Central Park and then had their houses, schools, and churches taken away from them, Diane raised

the general question of who owns the land.[26] At the same time, she showed a video on the Underground Railroad that children thought was possibly too "violent when a master split a slave's head open," as James M. put it. The discussion of who owns land and why got lost; rather the children's talk turned to whether they should watch this disturbing video that included, aside from the violence, "mean language from the slave owners about the slaves" and the observation that "being a slave is nasty and harsh because you are doing other people's work."

Diane restated the children's concerns: "I think everybody in this class was disturbed in some way. Everybody should have been disturbed; it was a disturbing time in our country. *Nobody* should have to see those things, but those events happened because people like our grandmothers—whom we love—treated others like that in those days." While Diane made it clear that this history was disturbing, she did not explicate who were the people doing what to whom. In her view, grandmothers, "whom we love," were part of that unsettling time, and she did not distinguish between the children whose families were slaves or those who were slave owners. In a classroom centered more on critical pedagogy than on children's individual questions, the teacher (or maybe even the children) would have been more ready to hold up Diane's statement to critique.

How much critique the teacher should encourage for six- to eight-year olds remains an open question. Diane believes that without a child's own expressed question about race or ethnicity, the child is neither open nor ready to consider a decontextualized imposed perspective. It is also a genuine teaching dilemma whether White children or children of color need different responses than those children with shared heritages ("a child of color[s]," as Robert Elliot Fox [1996] puts it). Is Diane's vagueness a service to multiracial children at this age or not? These hard topics are not yet sufficiently explored in schools.

Diane did not ask children to bring in cultural artifacts, nor did she enact curriculum that introduced differences in background. This study implies that cultural interchange can happen without a teacher asking children and families to share their backgrounds as did, for example, Vivian Paley (1995). Although Diane asked children to share their thoughts and experiences, she did not prompt them to include explicitly cultural material. About Thanksgiving time, when she asked children to reflect on "gathering" when they were in the circle, some mentioned family gatherings, but holiday traditions were not the focus.

That explicit teacher talk of race, ethnicity, hair, and skin color was absent in Diane's predominately multiracial class did not seem to present problems for children. Diane's stance may even be appropriate for six- to eight-year olds if they don't bring those issues forward. It is possible that Diane's reliance on children's expressed interests covers up both children's hidden feelings and the propensity for adults to be silent, thus reinforcing the status quo and failing to further the development of children's solid

[26]In the end, the exhibit aroused little interest, and the highlight of the trip turned out to be the children's risk-taking on a rope apparatus in the park. Diane and the children thought it was a wonderful trip.

cultural identities. I have no answers from this study about how to treat race and ethnicity in a second/third grade classroom, just my sense that glib responses to the questions I have raised do not serve children.

While my study did not turn up any evidence about racial incidents that might have answered my questions, religion was another matter. I now shift the focus to illuminate a piece of the world where secular-minded teachers rarely go.

CHAPTER

4

Home: I Test All Practices by the Word of God

We have to recognize that home is ultimately more important than school—it is the out-of-school life that helps the person to keep alive—to stand in the school arena and not be crushed.

Lillian Weber (1997), p. 89

Religion and a personal relationship with God is a home value that neither Diane nor I attended to sufficiently, since in our experience religious concerns rarely showed up in school. In retrospect, it is clear that children with a deep belief in God can easily keep themselves apart in a secular public school. Nonreligious teachers who came to teaching in the sixties, especially in New York City (and I include myself), fill the school's job rolls. We have no incentives to acquire that knowledge, even as the times and the demographics of our classrooms change.[27] Constitutional church/state separation militates against inviting religious beliefs into the classroom and into teachers' discussions, but despite the potential explosiveness of the topic, educators need to know what is on children's minds.

Deborah at Seven

All children must make sense of the differences between home and school, but some children travel more distance than others. Almost seven years old when she entered Diane's class, Deborah McMann had traveled a long way, geographically and psychologically, from home to school. This was her first classroom with White peers, her first secular education, her first White teacher, and her first experience away from a Caribbean-centered neighborhood and school life. Deborah's mother, Virginia, did not know what Deborah would encounter at PS 3, but she assumed all public schools were alike. Location alone dictated her choice. Even then, logistics were not so convenient: Virginia's job tracking royalty payments for a publishing house required a ten-minute

[27] See Gary Alan Fine and Jay Mechling (1993) on symbolic demography—the tendency of people to act according to images and ideas acquired earlier in a particular social, demographic location.

walk to the subway and then a forty-minute ride, a ten-minute walk to school to drop Deborah, then another ten-minute walk to work. Her return trip at 5:30 p.m. was slightly longer. At first, Deborah slept on the train, but as she became more wide-awake in school, she stayed more alert on the subway.

Both Deborah and her mother admitted to being "nervous" about public school. Deborah had known friends from her old school "since I was a baby," and "making new friends was scary." In addition to social life with children who looked very different than her old classmates, her experience in first grade predicted academic heartache. Each night at home, her old school required that Deborah memorize fifty spelling words and complete worksheets in several subjects. Each day in school, her first grade teacher wrote on her long lists of spelling words, dictations, or arithmetic problems: "Wrong"; "You do not listen"; "Careless"; "Incomplete." When she didn't conform, Deborah told me, "The principal was MEAN. He used to beat our hands with a ruler." Although Deborah was not retained in first grade, she left without a stellar academic reputation or confidence in her abilities at school. Diane knew none of this information when Deborah arrived.

After Virginia's experience during Deborah's first grade, Diane's focus on Deborah as an individual with her own strengths reassured her parents, even as they found the classroom baffling.[28] What eased the experience of school for Deborah was the fluid classroom expectations, not the standardization often cited as the foundation for high achievement. Deborah's success grew from an elastic classroom setting that created multiple entrances for the family to engage in school life. The experience was not without growth for both the McManns and Diane.

Home: Joyful, Crowded, Religious

Virginia described Deborah at home as graceful and in motion (2/1/98):

> Deborah loves to dance—alone anytime. She will be sitting there and just get up and dance. She's never embarrassed to show herself. She'll dance with her father, dance with anyone. You see her gliding by herself across the floor without music. She coaches her sisters to follow her.

Finding space to dance is a challenge. Deborah lives with her extended family in a frame house in Brooklyn, which overlooks a major boulevard recently renamed for a famous African American. Deborah's father, Peter, tends the grass, flower beds, and

[28]Susan Semel (1996) observes that "progressive educators and multicultural educators need an extended conversation about the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy" (p. 156). In many ways, Diane's classroom could be seen as the kind of classroom that Lisa Delpit criticizes so powerfully in her well-known and influential article, entitled "Silenced Dialogue" (1995), as being detrimental to African-American children. Life in any classroom is too complex to be categorized, however; in Diane's classroom, progressive and culturally relevant practices overlap. The point is not to label categories, but to keep the conversation alive.

stone walk from the curb to the door. Inside, Virginia and her younger sister Yvette take care to keep the house ordered and comfortable. Virginia sews the curtains, bedspreads, and pillow shams that decorate a house that is "too small for all of us." Family activities take place in the living room around a large TV, with open play space for the three children on the carpeted floor and around the table in the adjacent dining area. On my visits, various extended family members simultaneously ate dinner, watched TV, chatted with me, tended a year-old cousin, played school, and listened to Christian tapes for children. Each activity seemed to be carved out in a private space, even as the contact is public and companionable.

But crowdedness is a constant topic—the saga of trying to find a house that is large enough for this extended family is ongoing. Meanwhile, Deborah and her four-year-old sister, Yassie, sleep on the carpeted floor at the foot of her parent's bed in one bedroom. Her mother's sister, Yvette, and Deborah's two-year-old sister, Alia, sleep in the bed in another bedroom. Her maternal uncle, LeRoy, sleeps downstairs in a separate living unit with Peter's relatives. This extended family feels comfortable and known here in this neighborhood, where they have lived for at least eight years and are within walking distance to church, a nearby park, and local stores. They would push themselves even harder to afford a larger house, but rising prices make that impossible.

When I began this project, I did not appreciate how much religion mattered to the families I encountered. Religion has never been central to my life. Celebrating Passover every other year or so is a pleasure, and my family considers that enough religion. The most striking instance of my inexperience took place the first time I visited Deborah's Seventh-day Adventist family (5/5/97). Her father had just come home from work. He asked me, "Are you religious?" I was standing in the center of the living room, crossing to retrieve a pencil. I asked him if he was religious (wasn't I the researcher?), and instantly we cut to the heart of belief, right in front of an aunt, an uncle, the mother, and two children, all who watched me from the periphery of the room as I struggled to answer to his question, "Do you believe in God?"

"Well, uh, no," I stammered.

"Do you believe in any Higher Being?"

"Not exactly." I remember being dizzy as I said it.

"You're an atheist, then?"

"I guess so."

Virginia sucked in her breath. The children hung on every word. Finally, Deborah's father elicited that I'm involved in family ritual at home (Passover) and that I might be comfortable being called a humanist. I know now how I might have better answered—with a discussion of what kind of a God do I *not* believe in. The point is how different my Reform Jewish worldview is from that of this observant Seventh-day Adventist family from Grenada. As I have tried to understand the quality of religious commitment involved in a religious home, it gives me some notion of how I and other

educators often make assumptions without sufficient understanding. I hardly realized what I was seeing at the time I recorded it.

To secular readers, the story I am about to tell may seem to bear too much weight, but that is not so for those whose centrality is their relationship with God (Sears and Carper, 1998).

Entering a New and Public School

On the first day of school, parents looked more tense than children. Another adult explained to Virginia: "We're from rural Pennsylvania; my daughter has never been to a city school." If this Caucasian mother with a large nose ring and an exclamatory delivery disturbed Virginia, it did not show. When Virginia, who was wearing a starched white blouse, answered with her Granadian lilt, "It is Deborah's first day at this school, too," the other mother issued what seemed like an offer born of anxiety: "Patricia and Deborah can keep each other company!" Eventually they did. Deborah later confided to me, "Patricia was the first one I told I was Christian" (5/18/97).

Deborah embarked on school life with vigor. Even on the first day, when Diane missed Deborah's raised hand, Deborah easily approached Diane after the circle, requesting to paint, whereupon Diane took her by the hand to join a small group. In the first month, Deborah chose the most social projects: building with others, planting, making origami cranes (an activity organized by a third grader), joining a dance teacher after the Aquarium trip where "she danced graceful fishlike movements" (9/19/96). Deborah shared her own stories in circle, first softly and when encouraged by peers, in a loud, clear voice. When children's book author Robin Tzannes (a former parent in the class) read her creation, *Professor Puffendorf's Secret Potion*, Deborah was right up in front, enthralled, listening with openmouth attention (9/25/96).

Sometimes she vigorously resisted school life. The first week she complained about making a list of healthy snacks, avoided an assigned seat in a tiff with a student teacher, and repeatedly chewed gum against the rules, which brought her into direct confrontation with Diane. Most dramatically, she balked at kickball—an activity she had not experienced—and refused Diane's direct instruction. She "disappeared" from the cafeteria when she should have been in the after-school program, confidently finding her way around the building. Diane secretly thought her explorations were "great" but couldn't condone travels so far from adult supervision.

Deborah made classroom friends, even though the configurations and intensity of those friendships changed frequently. She picked up the fluid classroom climate Diane created: During circle, Nilsa taught her how to make long cellophane-tape fingernails, which she showed off proudly, although the ostensible task required listening to a story (9/10/96). Deborah and Joetta got to know each other over math chip games when they often burst into gales of laughter, totally ignoring the intended math activity. When Kristian didn't have a story of his own to read in the circle, he reached over to read from Deborah's notebook. When he read, "My First Day at PS 3, My New

School. I love my teacher because she teaches good and she cares about us," Luiz protested. "That couldn't be Kristian's writing because Kristian isn't new." Kristian and Deborah just giggled as if they shared a deep secret (9/20/96). Still, a recurrent theme throughout the year was her health, particularly stomach aches, which necessitated retreating to the sidelines or the nurse's office.

As Diane recalled Deborah's entry into the classroom, she ascribed Deborah's tentativeness to the new and possibly disconcerting experience of being with so many children who did not look like her (12/7/98). Diane may have based her intuitive opinion on this kind of below-the-surface visual detail that I picked up in my notes three weeks into the year: "During the circle Deborah was playing with Patricia's long blond hair almost as if it might give out a hurtful electric charge. Without comment Diane asked Deborah to move" (9/28/96). Deborah told me later that "Patricia used to pull my corn rows so hard it hurt" (6/4/97). Diane also noted early that the homework Deborah wrote at home had a certain stiltedness, as if her work were being monitored for correctness. Diane wondered whether "Deborah trusted herself academically" (9/17/96). Race and academics—two familiar categories—did not account for religion, which turned out to be the most salient characteristic of her home life.

Virginia's Pathway to a Home-School Alliance

Deborah's mother, Virginia, found her way into the classroom on a path not taken by every parent—the written word. On the first day of school, Diane sent home a three-page, single-spaced letter "to make myself visible to families." When parents retrieved the following missive from children's backpacks, along with snack, trip, and homework information, they encountered Diane's philosophy and the authority of her voice:

> I have been teaching at this school since 1972. During those years, I have developed some firm ideas. Let me tell you some of the things I think. All people are educable. Children learn best when the surrounding is nonthreatening, when they are assured of safety, justice, and have friends. With the help of interesting people to work with, interesting material to investigate, and people who are interested in their ideas, the children are able to recognize the contributions of others and make contributions themselves. Children can see who they are and become who they are not yet. . . .This coming to know is a lifelong process. Education is a lifelong process.

The letter was also an open invitation to parents:

> I am very interested in what you think is important for your child's development. . . I have found that if asked, people are willing to share their thoughts. As nurturing children is a partnership, I think it would be helpful if I knew some of your thinking. Please do some thinking and writing about your child's interests, ways of going about things and concerns you have. Let me know the language you speak at home with your children. This kind of reflection is hard work. I also know how valuable

> it is for our work together. Please feel free to write out as much as you'd like; it is an important thing to do for yourself. I would most appreciate your sharing this with me, perhaps sometime next week.

Virginia was immediately captivated by the "thoughtfulness and genuineness" of Diane's first-day letter. She said, "I rested easier after I studied the letter and reread it several times. I felt inspired by Diane's seriousness and was ready to entrust my daughter to her care." In answer to Diane's request, she handwrote, on yellow legal-sized paper, a careful description of her child. This letter opened an avenue for Virginia that served her well throughout Deborah's stay in Diane's class as she and Diane created and read what each other wrote over two years. Virginia studies scripture each day. Careful attention to the written word was part of her cultural experience.

Virginia also connected in person. By skipping lunch and working late, she shifted her workday so she could go on the first class trip to the Aquarium. On this beautiful sunny September morning, Diane spent much of her time making all five parents comfortable, allowing them to see her "tight" procedures for safety on the subway (twenty-seven new second and third graders on a subway during rush hour is a trip in itself), demonstrating trust for children's and adults' good judgment, and affirming parents' ability to manage the small groups of children assigned to each parent. Diane asked parents to write about the trip for homework alongside their children. Virginia did that assignment.

Formal Respect for the Teacher

The first parent/teacher conference could have been a tense time. Diane often begins her twice yearly scheduled half hour meetings with parents by saying, "Tell me about *your* child," even though she frequently gets the response, "But I thought I was going to listen and you were going to talk." When parents are primed to listen, when they believe that power is unequal and that the stakes for impressing the teacher are high, conferences can be uneasy. Even though Virginia had responded to Diane's invitation to write about Deborah, had been on two class trips, and had attended parent's night, neither Deborah's parents nor Diane knew what to expect from each other in the first conference. Sensing the need for a more formal conference, Diane changed her usual style and began first. From my notes: (11/14/96):

> Deborah's mother was dressed in a rakish leather beret, black coat and scarf, which she didn't remove. Her very tall husband, whom I hadn't met at that time, was casually dressed and "in charge." (He was a powerful presence!) Virginia deferred. She was more contained than when I talked to her on the last trip.
>
> All was not easy. Diane talked about Deborah doing wonderful work at home but not at school. "I know she has the skills, but I wonder about her work in school." Diane said that Deborah must feel safe here or she wouldn't be all over the school during after school hours. "But it really isn't safe and she needs to stay put." Deborah's father said sever-

> al times, "You have my full authority to exercise any discipline you feel necessary." Unusual in Diane's conferences, she invited Deborah into the conference to explain why she absented herself from the after-school program. Her father was firm with her. Deborah didn't say anything, except when pushed: "Yes, Diane. I will stay where I am supposed to. . . ." Very formal.
>
> When excused by the adults, Deborah approached Pei-Yee, who was in the classroom because her parents had not picked her up on this half day of school. We all (student teacher, Diane, parents, me) watched Deborah engage Pei-Yee, who spoke very little English at that point. Diane interpreted: "Look how Deborah can make an overture and be accepted. She has real social and leadership skills." Parents beamed at Deborah's charming and skilled interactions with a Chinese classmate.
>
> Then the father said something that moved me to tears. He said, "You can't pay teachers enough for the job they are doing raising the next generation. Thank you." Diane then said, "And you, for raising the next generation." I have rarely heard that kind of talk in any of my parent conferences ever. Maybe too sweet, but sincere. It was a warm moment of a stiff conference.

This twenty minutes was unlike Diane's usual conferences where parents bring up concerns about their child. Diane was honest in asserting that Deborah's schoolwork was not up to what she appeared capable of doing at home. Diane capitalized on Pei-Yee's presence to make explicit a shared image of Deborah's social strengths. Diane did not respond to the invitation to use any discipline necessary (which sounded to me like a coded invitation to continue the ruler-rapping of Deborah's former principal). On the home side, other than Deborah's father's generalized, but heartfelt admiration for teachers, the parents mainly listened to Diane. I was puzzled by Virginia's lack of exuberance, expressed to me a week earlier, that the family felt "warmly embraced" and happy at PS 3. Perhaps Virginia's reticence should have been a signal.

That the family respected teachers was clear. Known only to me (and not until much later) was how much the family stories highlighted the seriousness of education. Virginia told me (3/5/97): "I was the second oldest of twelve siblings. My family was poor, but always fed and well-dressed. My mother died when I was sixteen and my youngest sibling was three. My father left the home, and my community thought that's the end of this family group." Virginia attributes the family's ultimate success to her church and her faith in God. She finished primary school and had no money for secondary school, "but for pennies in Grenada you can hire tutors at home to help you pass secondary exams." She passed several O level British subject exams as did her husband. Deborah's father grew up in "abject poverty." He supervises maintenance crews on a New York City bridge and is, Virginia said with great pride, "sponsoring" her brother to study engineering in college—what he would have done himself had he the money.

Family Readiness for Disequilibrium

By choosing a public school, Virginia showed that she was ready for a new adventure and that her family was prepared to willingly accept some measure of disequilibrium, expand or shift their worldview, occasionally have their assumptions upset, and tolerate the uncertainty that accompanies encounters with strangers.

That Virginia thinks for herself and therefore had arrived ready to fit into the PS 3 culture of questioning authority became clear when she talked about two details of her religious practice. For most Seventh-day Adventists, worship begins at 9:15 on Saturday morning. Virginia has made her own peace with that convention: "God means us to rest on the Sabbath, and therefore He doesn't mean I have to rush." She and her three daughters (all beautifully dressed, which takes time) arrive at the church at 11:00. Each month Virginia tithes as the Scripture dictates, but each month she decides where she wants her money to go: "I don't always tithe to the big boys in the central office."

Virginia kept her eyes open when she dropped off and picked up Deborah. She understood some progressive strands from her own education. From an interview (11/7/96):

> Another thing that amazes me is when I saw kids in the classroom with mud and water. Back home we call it play house and that is something that I grew up with and I thought Deborah would never have that. I know it is going to help her reason well, develop her judgment.

In other ways, Virginia went with the flow of novel events. When she dropped into class on her lunch hour to deliver a birthday present for Deborah to take to a party after school, Diane beckoned her to sit in the circle and join the children in describing an Edward Sorel *New Yorker* cover (6/16/97) of tourists on a bus looking at native New Yorkers dressed as various mythical animals. She raised her eyebrows high but did as Diane requested, contributing an observation on her turn in the go-around.

When the family came to the Friday night All-School Square Dance to see this American dance form, they had to leave at sundown, before the music started. Virginia appeared totally nonplussed by parents' table conversation about young children's sexuality and condoms. A discussion of cultural differences (my presence perhaps) elicited that she had no dancing in her background because the church thought it was devilish, but she felt dancing and music should be part of praising God, so she and her family dance at home.

Assimilation: Are You Leaving?

In November, Virginia commented how she felt "embraced by people of all races" (11/7/96):

> Before I came [to PS 3] I looked at education differently. I used to think that for children to grow up spiritually you better take them to an Adventist school. I wouldn't say I was shut in, but I was one-

> sided. . . .But I was amazed at the respect and how we were embraced by people of all races at PS 3. Deborah can see that. I think she will deal better in our society. This is preparation for the world ahead of her, to work and live in this society. . . . To me she is closer to the White kids because she has no choice. . . I think being with those kids who, you might say, are more national than she is, I think she will be able to understand and adapt better than if she were only in our society.

This willingness to assimilate did not preclude the question from the family's Caribbean community: Are you leaving us by sending your child to a public school? Yet Virginia confirmed her pleasure in this multiracial setting that was new to Deborah:

> Because of the community we live in we are basically one—Caribbean Blacks. The last school she came from was more Caribbean oriented. . . the books came from the Caribbean—all their books were Caribbean. So she had a clear concept of where she came from. . . . Where she is now she knows the difference. For that reason she will be able to adapt well to where we come from. We go back home every two years. We eat the food [here]. You know, this country has allowed everybody to remain in their own culture.

Virginia's confidence that a public school will be good for Deborah wins out even as she finds ways to keep home and school separate.

Naming the Barrier Slowly

On the surface, Deborah and her mother entered school uneventfully. Academic pressure evaporated. Deborah no longer returned home each day with work marked deficient. She genuinely liked to go to school with her best friends who "share their snake with me" (notebook, 9/18/96). She no longer brought work home in all subjects or massive numbers of words to memorize, which was a relief to Virginia. While Deborah's empty math book and the notion of "oral math" startled Virginia and she struggled with Deborah's nightly open-ended assignment to "write something," both Deborah and Virginia felt comfortable and "warmly embraced" at school. No one at school lived anywhere near Deborah so Virginia was thrilled—even relieved—when Deborah invited a White and a Latina classmate to her October birthday party at home, and both immediately accepted "without a moment's hesitation to come to an unfamiliar area in Brooklyn."

That said, Deborah's transition to this new school might have been more comfortable and her learning made easier if her home beliefs had been known and acknowledged. Deborah had her religious family *and then she went to school* (Suina, 1991). Although various barriers could have inhibited Deborah (Kohl, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Poplin, 1993; Rose, 1989), it was the rarely explored barrier of religious belief that marginalized her.

In coming to understand how parents see the world, educators need to know about children and their families, but what is it we need to know? How can we talk to fam-

ilies about their responsibility for providing knowledge and support children in ways that are meaningful and not intimidating? Where in school can families' voices be heard on topics that require trust to reveal? When does a teacher's need to know become intrusive? How does knowledge about a child's religious beliefs find its way into a secular classroom?

The Absence of Religion at School

As quickly as Deborah's father brought up religion at home—after about ten minutes—the first intimation of Deborah's religious beliefs did not appear at school until Halloween, and then only vaguely. Three early clues to her religious interests escaped Diane's notice, perhaps because religious belief does not play a central role in Diane's life. Entitled "Aunty's baby's dedication," Deborah described this event:[29]

> The baby had a lovely white dress and the preacher blest her. I enjoyed singing and playing with my freinds. After that I went home and we changed our close. Then we had a party (9/21/96).

Diane did not register this retelling of the Biblical parable of "The Prodigal Son" on October 7:

> A man was rich he had two sons so one day the little son asked his father for the rich position and the father gave him. He left and went to a far-away land and spent all his money on wines and women, freids and parties. He was hungry and he had nothing to eat and no freinds. So he said I would go back home to my father. When he went back his father ran to him and fell on his knees and kissed him and put a ring on his finger.

Nor did Diane pick up on this piece, written on October 17, just about the time everyone began gearing up for Halloween. Deborah wrote:

> The real name of Halloween is All Saint. The librarian said that and my mom said that too. The Dictionary says that a saint is a holy person. The Roman Catholic church publicly declares such holy people to be saints after death. In America people celebrate Halloween with pumpkins and scery masks, and gost like costumes.

Deborah sought authoritative information from the librarian, her mother, and the dictionary, yet a reference-book tone veiled her struggle to make sense of the relationship among saints, holy people, and Halloween's pagan roots. "In America. . .," perhaps a proxy for ideas her family opposes, bespeaks a place far from Deborah's own experience. It was. No one at school recognized Deborah's religious background, nor did anyone foresee that the experience of Halloween was new to her. Neither Deborah nor Virginia knew that Halloween at PS 3 was a cultural happening, nor did Diane know about the centrality of the family's religious beliefs.

[29] I have retained Deborah's spelling and punctuation.

Deborah's First-Ever Halloween

Halloween—a week-long event at PS 3—is not low-key. Deborah came to school not knowing what to expect on the actual day. Excerpts from my field notes, October 31, 1996:

> I am struck by the contagious unselfconscious exuberance that would never have taken place at my own children's much stuffier school. Some parents are as elaborately costumed as kids are. Many faculty are dressed as corn products to make a political point in support of the guidance counselor whose hours have been cut and whose name is a variation on corn. Diane is an elaborate corn stalk.
>
> At 8:30 a.m. kids congregate in this second/third grade classroom, appreciating each other's costumes. As Luiz's mom watches kids line up for the annual parade around the neighborhood, she observes: "Funny, the boys all look disgusting and the girls look beautiful." She is right—the boys have awful scars and dripping blood while the girls have sparkling eye make up and feather boas; even Joetta's tiger costume is glamorous rather than fierce. Only two children in Diane's class are not in costume: Tero ("My father didn't buy it yet") and second-grade Deborah whose story I don't know. Deborah has on a red dress and a black and red jacket, not a usual school outfit, but not an obvious costume either. Before the parade someone asks her what she is. She doesn't say. Patricia answers for her: "She's the new kid on the block." Sounds like a witty costume to me and I accept the comment at face value.
>
> After the parade around the neighborhood, kids return to the classroom. Nell's mother is there, wearing a suit, high heels, colored foil fake eyelashes, and blood running down her mouth. She has brought snack (fruit and cheese—no sugar allowed in Diane's classroom, even on Halloween). Diane asks kids to write, draw, read, be quiet while some children get the apples together for the party and put finishing touches on the haunted house. Nell's spooky tape is playing all of a sudden.
>
> Diane's class is hosting a haunted house for all the classes on the floor. Kids—mostly third graders—have planned the whole event, taking risks by climbing high up to hang skeletons and drape dark spaces. They have figured out imaginative ways to jump out and scare their peers. It is really very clever—and very scary—with kids in corners and closets leaping out without warning. The spider webs that were up on Tuesday are still intact, even with all the activity. Kids are pleased with what they are doing. Sam's mother comes in and kids ask if they can practice on her. Luiz tells her exactly what will happen and she agrees. She assures kids that "it is really scary," thanks them and leaves. Now the haunted house is for real. High excitement. Kids urge each other to "Get in your places." I am sitting in the middle with my laptop, absolutely unnoticed. The principal comes to check out the safety and

supervision. Two kids at a time go through and are given candy for their reward (an exception to the no sugar rule). Diane comes to watch. Hard to believe this is only a second/third grade activity.

In the other room, Tero has the electric piano on the Moonlight Sonata, an odd choice, but a pleasant accompaniment to the scene of one hundred apples hanging by their stems off long strings across the classroom. Kids are trying to bite them with their hands behind their back. They are having a good time. Everyone is biting apples, including Deborah.

Right before lunch Deborah is in tears. Luiz asks, "Why are you crying? Because you don't celebrate Halloween?" Deborah doesn't say. Mirasol answers: "Because she was scared in the haunted house." A few minutes later, Deborah tells the student teacher about the haunted house. "It scared me; it scared me to death." She elaborates: "When I went in the haunted house they scared me and when I went to get the candy all the scary masks came at me and I started to cry. And then they told me to go back in the classroom and they told Diane. And then Liza and Marisol began to be mean to me. They called me names and then we started to be friends again." Despite the strong feelings conveyed by her story, Deborah appears fully healed as she leaves for lunch.

Later she chooses not to hear the librarian's scary story. At the end of the day, kids are talking about trick or treat plans. I ask Deborah about hers and she says simply, "We don't celebrate Halloween." I ask: "Is it for a religious reason?" No answer. "Are you a Jehovah's Witness?" She whispers, "No, my family is Christian." Deborah offers no more information to me or to Diane, who has overheard this exchange. I wonder, how did a child so young figure out that she was so different from the rest of the class. Why did she say Christian without any explanation of details? Given Deborah's reticence, Diane did not probe, nor would she have let me violate this child's privacy. I record Deborah's laconic answer, but I don't know what to make of it in connection with her tears, or lack of costume.

That Deborah shared her fears with student teachers and friends (even as they reverted to typical second grade exclusionary behavior) confirmed that she felt emotionally safe enough to confide her feelings—no small matter. But seven weeks into Deborah's tentative PS 3 membership, she was confronted with a foreign, slightly forbidden marker of the school community. Her reluctant disclosure, "My family is Christian," got lost, the strong Halloween celebration flowed around her, and her struggles with whether Halloween is religious went unrecognized.

At the end of the Halloween school day when her peers went out to scare the world, collect UNICEF money, and "gross out" on sugar, she went home to a regular school night. Deborah (alone in the class) did her writing homework:

> At clay class we make all kinds of things like animals and plaques. We go there on Tuesdays. Diane puts us in groups. Each class in PS 3 goes but they go on different days. It is a lot of fun. The clay teacher sometimes tells us what to make but most time we do whatever we whant to do. The best thing of all is James made a army out of clay.

One might conclude from this writing—so distant from the recent excitement—that Halloween made no impact on Deborah, but perhaps it is no accident that she chose a subject that reintegrated her with a community where all children participate. She deftly captured the predictable regularity of the Tuesday art-making where each class has a turn, teachers are present and put children in groups, choices are sometimes given, plaques and animals are crafted, and her pleasure in a peer's clay army is high.

The Community Holds a Mirror to Itself Without Reflecting Deborah

An interview with the principal on November 1, 1996, represents accurately, I think, the school community's view of Halloween:

> Halloween is a joy in this school, a metaphor and an excuse. Our school celebration brings the community together in a generosity of spirit, a playfulness. It is a way for the children, educators, and parents to join on an even plane, a way for us to care for one another. The school works as a community as the day moves along and floors combine to have joint activities. It's a party for 600. When else could I dress up as a little boy with freckles giving out carrots as a character from a storybook? Parents and teachers use Halloween as an opportunity to make it safe to take risks. Kids and adults take emotional risks and physical risks. It is the community taking a mirror to itself.

"The community taking a mirror to itself" suggests a powerful image of a ritual that binds its members—and Deborah was not included. Deborah was an outsider on Halloween, her feelings surely heightened by the day's high-adrenaline nature. According to Patricia Calderwood (1998), outsiders can never experience a sense of community (pp. 1–2). In that definition of community, members must share identity, beliefs, values, norms, practices, history, and goals specific and unique to the group. Further, differences between competing values, beliefs, and practices within the group must be recognized, reconciled, or tolerated; and competent membership within the community must be learned.

If Deborah is going to benefit from this new experience and learn to be part of an inclusive community, even when she differs significantly, the school needs to acknowledge her by recognizing her own religious values. If a community is going to expand to include *all* families, schools and families have to reach for a different standard of awareness.

Genuine communities invite individual and minority views (Westheimer, 1998). Halloween may be an obvious example of a contentious school issue, but because its celebration matters so much to PS 3, dissenters are almost invisible. Multiple forums exist for debate, but the parent association leaders, teachers, and administrators are too preoccupied with daily school politics to add a meaningful reconsideration of Halloween to their agendas. The absence of a place for contrary voices to be heard calls into question whether PS 3 is a genuine community. In a conception close to PS 3's ideal, Jon Snyder (1994) maintains that:

> A community can only be created by its members. It emerges and changes in the particularity of specific contexts. It can only be achieved over time: time to establish and continually reestablish the trust and respect necessary to its evolution; time to make who one is as an individual and as an institution visible to oneself and others. . . . It is [a] shared commitment to enact common values. . . with all the angst that involves (p. 2).

Can a family that does not celebrate Halloween really belong to a community that is unconflicted about this week-long event? There is no angst over Halloween at PS 3. By venerating Halloween, the school does not mean to marginalize any child's religious experience, but it happens.[30] Faculty and administration take their Halloween celebration for granted; questions from the outside help jog an understanding of "the way it is." From an interview with the principal (11/1/96):

> The undergraduates I teach had spent the day in the school and came in full of their responses. I must say I thought they were very judgmental. They asked, what about kids who don't have money for costumes and are next to kids who come in all elaborate because mothers have time and money? I said, "You're right; that is a good question and I'm going to tell you what I am observing. There are not judgments about costumes." That is the thing, kids care for each other. Not one-hundred percent, but there is a spirit of caring. The seminar students said things that made me think they didn't trust children. They made me realize the very premise of everything here is absolutely trusting the kids.
>
> The students asked, what about the children who can't participate? What about religious sects that don't believe in Halloween? So I spoke

[30]I was surprised by the numbers of readers of this draft who told stories of their own children's fear and unhappiness over Halloween celebrations, both at PS 3 and at other schools, even though the reasons were not religious. Readers also told stories of exclusion having to do with religion. For instance, a teacher asked, "Where did the sun come from?" and a child said quietly, "Yeah, but where did God come from?" This challenge was never publicly acknowledged, and the child stayed silent during the rest of the science lesson. Or the fifth grader who completed a unit on six world religions—his own Zoroastrianism was not included. The teacher had not heard of it. When his mother volunteered to do a presentation, he did not want her to because he "felt like he had two heads or something. . . ."

> with them about how we work with each kid and each family. Many teachers—well, three—came and asked me and we spoke with the families and gave them choices. The families could say, "It is all right for my child to do this, but not this." "My child could have candy, but not celebrate." But it is not only the students who wonder about Halloween. I have six principals in this district who are friends, who are in a book group with me. None of them do Halloween in their schools. I spoke to the students about being careful not to give away an entirely positive experience because of a few negative or difficult problems. I said to them, it's like deciding to have a silent lunch because there are discipline problems. Better to figure out the little problems in the big picture and keep the vision than do away with the vision because of the little problems.

Diane was not one of the three teachers who approached the principal, even though she would have met the family on any ground. She was not in a position to do it alone, without help from the family. Had Diane known Deborah's background, she might have been more alert to Deborah's awkward responses to her classmates' questions and helped her to talk about her lack of costume and why she believed as she did. She might have prepared her for the haunted house and heard her questions about the origins of Halloween. She might have created an opportunity for Deborah to talk to the class (or at least a small group or maybe one friend) about why Halloween was not part of her tradition. Diane had no clue that Deborah did not "celebrate Halloween," nor did she know that Deborah and her family were Christian or what that might mean for Deborah's participation in the classroom. Even were Diane a Christian herself, she would not necessarily know the code; being Christian does not preclude celebrating Halloween. Deborah's halting admission conveyed too little information, and Diane was reluctant to probe beyond what was offered in an area that is usually off-limits in school. Religion simply does not show up clearly enough on the radar screen of the nonreligious.

Contrast the following two views. The principal at PS 3 saw Halloween representing "generosity of spirit and playfulness." Virginia, however, wrote:[31]

> I want Deborah to understand that like so many other occasions—Christmas, Easter, etc.—that Halloween is a deflection of the Creator God. Humankind exhibits a form of Godliness while denying the power of God. Halloween worships the passed creature instead of giving God the credit and honor for Life.

The secular school culture centering on Halloween contributed to a break in the community for Deborah and her family. "Community" is derived from the Latin word *communis*, and in its earliest and most enduring sense, links *under obligation* with

[31]Diane and I do most of our co-constructing of text on the phone; I read aloud and Diane takes issue, makes corrections, and suggestions. Virginia and I devised a different method: Virginia affixed post-its with her comments to my draft. Then I retyped her comments in bold and sent the draft back to her for more comments.

together (Raymond Williams quoted in Patricia Calderwood, p. 2), which prompts the thought that if classroom community is going to expand to include all families, then Diane, Deborah, and Virginia (and Diane adds "the public") share an obligation to talk about Halloween. At first, shortly after Halloween, when I asked Virginia, she agreed with the principal's position that giving up Halloween was not a necessary good; neither did she feel that she needed to help the school, nor did she need to help Diane understand what was at stake so Diane could help Deborah with the murkier features of Halloween. Only later did her thinking change.

Who has the burden to begin this discussion of cultural difference? What is the family's responsibility for providing knowledge to the teacher? As things unfolded with this family, the school had the power. The parent and child had the choice of whether to participate. No matter how I describe the community, Halloween at PS 3 excluded this family from an important part of the school culture.

CHAPTER

5

Differing Perspectives

This is important about us: that we have selves, that we are active in the pursuit of meaning and value, that in that pursuit we are each uniquely situated, yet understandable to each other.

Patricia Carini, 1993, p. 5

Barriers separating teachers' and families' cultures can be unintentionally impenetrable. PS 3 and Diane had little experience with religious discussion since the sacred rarely showed up in a secular school. For their part, the family did not expect to find their religious beliefs accepted in this public setting and thus did not disclose them when they were in conflict with accepted school events. We live in a country governed by church/state boundaries.

An Unseen Barrier Between Home and School

During the first year, Deborah's daily writing soon dropped any references to religion. In what she shared with classmates in the circle and in the conversations between Deborah and her friends to which I was privy, the line between home and school held firm. When Deborah was a second grader, Virginia and Diane did not discuss religion at any conference or in any written communication or informal conversation.

Religious Boundaries Hold Firm

Used to keeping her Adventist faith to herself outside of her home, church, and neighborhood, Virginia had no inclination to lobby Diane about acknowledging it the classroom. This typical silence probably encourages children—including Deborah—to leave an important part of their life outside the classroom. Deborah may have gotten the message that her religious beliefs might not be welcome or appropriate at her new school. Home and school messages may have been reciprocally effective in keeping her Christian beliefs private, even secretive. Since other avenues were open to Deborah and her family to engage in school life, we will never know exactly how or

whether these mutually reinforcing messages about belief may have interfered with Deborah's learning.

Because Deborah did not bring her religious belief into school on her own, one might conclude that religion does not loom as large for her as it does for her mother. That is possible, but I doubt it. Deborah was engaged in the moral, factual, historical, and biblical aspects of religion. A few excerpted examples from my notes—all taken out of school—show her interests:

> April 14, 1997: On a school half-day, I took Deborah out for pizza and a chat. When we got our pizza and sat down, she opened the conversation by saying that her mother told her I was Jewish. "I saw a Jew once," she continued. "Jews wear black hats." She recounted a video where Jews and Christians changed clothes to fool the police. "We are all alike under the clothes," she concluded. I tell her Diane is Jewish and her mouth drops open in acute surprise. I do not get a clear sense of what is in her head about this new information. Again, probing on religious matters feels uncomfortable to me.
>
> May 5, 1997: The first activity at home is drawing. Deborah made an elaborate title page for "Jesus Stories" decorated with butterflies.
>
> May 18, 1997: The surrounding at home is full of religion, from the music on the tape player to the several editions of the *Bible for Children*, which are prominently displayed. After church with Deborah and her family, we sit on the living room rug reading the story of Esther together, one of Deborah's favorites. Deborah knows a huge amount about it. She does not so much dispute the story as interrogate it.
>
> Later, when I had my coat on and Deborah was sitting on the couch, she asked me whether I had gone to church with anyone else. I answered that I had never been to a church without a member of the congregation. She said: "No, I mean with anyone in the class." And then she allowed that Nilsa had said she was Christian. And Deborah added, as if she were telling something very secret and sensitive—"Patricia was the first one I told I was Christian."
>
> February 1, 1998: Virginia recounts a time when Deborah was not ready to leave the house in the morning and "I just left her. Then I looked back and she was coming. But I thought to myself, I will never do that again. When she caught up with me, Deborah asked: "Does God care about children? Does God care whether you treat me that way?"

Since neither Deborah nor her family could participate in any school activity that took place between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday, I could have treated as a barrier the deprivation Deborah might have felt by not being part of the talent show for which she practiced long and hard, or the classroom community of girls who got to know each other better at Friday night sleepovers. For some children, this absence would be crippling. As it was, friends may have missed Deborah. For Deborah, learning to appreciate the joyfulness of the God-centered Sabbath was the higher value.

Privacy as a Protective Barrier

While some well-intentioned educators oppose any exploration of personal religious beliefs as too intrusive, incurring too high a risk and too high a cost in invading the family's privacy, Diane is not against talk of religion in the classroom on principle.[32] Yet both Diane and Virginia saw the importance of privacy for children at school. Virginia recalled that when Mario's mother complained at Parent's Night that she no longer knew what her son was doing at school, Diane responded: "At this age children begin to need a private life at school." Virginia repeated often how important that reminder was for her to recognize Deborah's privacy at school. "Kids have to have a private school life—I agree with Diane about what she said at the meeting. Only bring me in for extreme cases. I don't need to know everything. Diane can handle it."

Diane picked up on Virginia's interest in privacy to suggest that children need privacy at home as well, so perhaps, Diane said, Deborah was content keeping religion at home. That may be true, but viewing the world from a religious child's perspective, it must feel strange to approach moral questions at school without bringing in God. If part of Deborah's identity is her relationship to God, she cannot leave religion at home. It is possible, however, that religious parents and children have gotten used to the idea that no one wants to hear about their religion or that they feel their religious beliefs are not acceptable. Perhaps Virginia or Deborah just lacked an opening that would have signaled acceptance; with an invitation, they each might have felt welcome to talk. A line from Virginia's interview might be a clue (11/7/96): "If you ask Deborah, she will tell you she reads scripture before she leaves home every day. . . . " *If you ask her.* No one at school was asking. Should they be? Parents need to take some responsibility, but families also need an atmosphere where they need not hesitate to come forth.

Halloween—Both Instructive and Divisive

At first, I thought that perhaps in the area of religion Virginia tended to discount school. Since she assigned school no role in helping Deborah clarify Halloween, maybe unconsciously Virginia was giving signals that school wasn't important. Such a parental attitude could certainly affect how Deborah approached her schoolwork, and even her homework. Yet, although Deborah's mother had no experience in guiding her daughter through Halloween, she had thought carefully about her stance. She rearranged her work schedule to stay for the school parade because she was "curious," and also, I am speculating, to see what Deborah saw.

A week after Halloween, Virginia joined a class trip and talked along the way, for the tape recorder, about why she wanted Deborah at school on Halloween:

[32]When religion was clearly an issue, Diane heard easily. The student teacher during the second semester, a practicing Muslim, could not go swimming with the class because her religion forbade her to wear a swim suit in front of any adult male, namely the lifeguard and fathers who accompanied the children. Diane encouraged her to explain this to the children and created the opportunity to do so.

> If Deborah was 12 and I would have sent her somewhere away from home and if I said to her, "As Seventh-day Adventists, we don't believe in Halloween," she would always have that zeal to know, to want to know. And perhaps she may defy me or defy rules. She might not want to get into it as much as if she knows what it is.
>
> Especially in this society to strive well, to be able to know what she believes, I think Deborah must have a reason for what she believes. When she has a reason she can understand, she can distinguish. Because when I grew up all I knew is that this is right, this is wrong. So I want her to be able to answer why you don't do that. She must be able to say "I don't do it because. . . " and to know something about the reason why.

Virginia was determined that her daughter know the difference between home and the wider world—but not at the expense of eroding religious values. This emphasis on nurturing Deborah's ability to distinguish right from wrong by experiencing differences was based on an appeal to rationality rather than tradition. Handing down values by this method involved some risk that knowledge of the forbidden would be too appealing, yet Virginia was confident that Deborah's religious values would remain solid in this secular environment. She felt no urgency to initiate a conversation about religion with anyone at school.

As it turned out, one Halloween was enough for Deborah; she did not come to school on Halloween the following year. Thus, all by itself, the school's very salient celebration of Halloween will always exclude her from that part of the PS 3 community. That seems unavoidable, even though the school community loses most from Deborah's absence in that it buries the issues and makes no attempt to imagine the world from another family's perspective. Halloween may mean little to Deborah compared with her much more central belief in God, but the rest of the school community might consider Deborah's absence—for the good of the community.

Deborah's participation in the community is not all or nothing—the effect of exclusion varies for different children. Some children caught between home and school might silently withdraw from classroom life to spend their time on the edges as marginalized nonmembers, or they might be left searching for a safe place, wondering what was the matter with them if no one discovered their interests or invited them to connect to school. Perhaps Deborah is resilient because her mother tells her regarding every aspect of her life, "God makes different circumstances and you take advantage of them," and "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13)." What the community loses without acknowledging Deborah is another question.

Chipping Away at the Barrier: Who Has to Change?

When I talked to Deborah eighteen months later, she remembered Halloween vividly, especially the issue of whether Halloween was religious and whose religion it was ("My mother says 'it is devilish'"). Of course, she remembered how scared she was and how she cried. When Diane read that comment in draft, she said, "Deborah was too scared

to learn from Halloween the first time; she needed another chance to 'know.'" Virginia saw the situation differently:

> I did not send Deborah to school the next Halloween because I was not sure she would have been respected enough to be allowed to stand on the sideline. I test all cultural practices by the Word of God. Culture does not make any practice right or wrong.

It is a worthy challenge for schools to take religious practice as seriously as does Deborah's family and to honor their obligations to God within the school's secular culture. At first, Virginia said, "I don't want to ask the school to make a special exception for my child." Virginia does not approve of the church/state separation: "It is just an excuse for one more of the many biases in this country." However, she certainly is aware how this separation becomes a barrier that makes it hard to consider an exception "legitimate," and thus it becomes an issue of respect. Another irritated, maybe angry, parent might have blamed the teacher or the school or removed her child.

Ultimately, Diane and Virginia had two different explanatory models of the place of religion in Deborah's life and two different ideas of where her energy should be placed. Both recognized that the secular school culture of PS 3, of which Halloween was a significant part, and Virginia's God-centered culture, where responsibility is primarily to God's law, do not have to be mutually exclusive. People participate in both cultures. But parent and teacher cannot begin to see the world through each other's eyes until each recognizes the potency of the other's culture. We need to keep multiple worldviews in mind or we create one-dimensional stereotypes. If cultural interchange of this kind—learning to imagine the world through others' eyes—is to benefit children in the classroom, then teachers and families must find ways to make their traditions, values, and beliefs explicit. If we cannot see that our own culture has its own set of interests, emotions, and biases, how can we expect to deal successfully with someone else's culture? Schools must make a comfortable space for families who differ on religious—or other cultural—dimensions so parents will have confidence that their children will be respected and that they can feel at ease requesting an exception. To this sentence Virginia wrote "Amen."

While both Diane and Virginia might have benefited from seeing each other's world more clearly to avoid the particular difficulties about Halloween, what happens in a classroom need not change the worldview of either the teacher or the family. Understanding each other's perspective does not signal the end of cultural differences. Deborah and her family had many realities that worked for them, as did Diane. People are not one thing.

Year-End Writing

In a long, year-end narrative report, Diane could point to Deborah's academic growth:

> Deborah told me about her learning this year that she is learning about the world. Through books, particularly history and biography, she is able to imagine herself in another time. She is particularly taken

> with mid-nineteenth century America. Deborah chooses her own books, sometimes getting help from her parents. She is able to lose herself in reading and writing.

Diane also addressed Deborah's exploration of a classroom culture that was foreign to her:

> Deborah has spent a great deal of time learning the language and nuance of her classmates. She has tried on some of their conduct and is working to see where her limits are. I think she is a bit more grounded but expect that she will continue to test her limits and those of the adults around her.

Virginia wrote to Diane at the end of the year:

> This year has been a very exciting one for Deborah and to some extent to us—her parents. Deborah is enjoying her new environment. She especially loves class trips, reading class after school, and having play dates with some of her classmates. She is unfolding socially and otherwise and because of this has started to reveal some unpleasant character flaws, some of which you may have noticed. First, I would like to thank you for the way you have handled her this school year and for your observations. I have noticed your interest in helping her by the books you give her and some of the written assignments she has had to do. I trust that those tactful counsels would eventually take root in her young mind. I must confess that although it's a struggle, I am obligated to the tasks of steering Deborah against her tidal waves of irresponsibility.
>
> On the other hand, my "little gem," as I affectionately call her, can be a most gracious, thoughtful, and potentially brilliant child. I am sometimes amazed at her level of reasoning. She enjoys being a big sister and loves doing fun things. In fact, you may have noticed in her writing and speaking that she sums up time and events with this single work "fun."
>
> I am indeed grateful that Deborah is privileged to be in your class for another year, Diane. I do not know if someone else might as quickly as you have been able to look past her charms to her needs. It is my desire that by the Grace of God, you would have a restful vacation. . . .

Because Diane had taken uncommon steps to get to know parents and Virginia had a reservoir of goodwill, this is a best-case scenario of a child whose religious practices went initially unacknowledged. Parents, however, especially if they differ in significant ways from the mainstream culture of the school, often keep their voices muted. Teachers never have the chance to learn; parents feel they are not being heard; and the cycle of ignorance and miscommunication continues. The lack of knowledge on the school's part and Virginia's reluctance to provide information will leave the barrier insurmountable until it is safe to discuss religion. Virginia responded: "I would do this differently in the future." But her response came only after Deborah's second year in Diane's class, when Diane had made changes.

CHAPTER

6

Opening the Doors for New Thinking in Year Two

To talk with someone,
ask a question first,
then—listen.

Antonio Machado, 1983, p. 5

Lillian Weber (1997) reminds educators that parents' strengths are powerful kernels that support children's learning. She urges teachers to think about becoming the carrier of those strengths. "Our job is to study what relationships and what kinds of things are supportive to the child's further growth and to try to see how to be a little continuous with those outside-school supports, even though the very nature of the school recreates limitations" (p. 89). In this case, the home kernels are religion and Deborah's Caribbean culture. Interestingly, for our original notion of cultural interchange, the initial alliance with Diane was not built on either of these cultural platforms.

The Boundaries Between Home and School

In the second year of the study, when I was writing this paper and discussing religious belief with Diane (the first such talk in seventeen years of intense conversation and we have barely begun), Diane rethought how she viewed Deborah's religion. Any teacher would have done the same, Diane maintained. It helped immeasurably that Virginia and Diane both participated in monthly parent gatherings. These meetings shifted the direction from school-determined subjects to parent-generated talk of home. Without these gatherings, perhaps no talk of religion would have come to the surface, but religion was not the primary focus of the group.

Responsibility

Work inspired by the Prospect Center in these monthly meetings contributed to an ongoing relationship between Diane and Virginia that allowed them to see how their perspectives differed and to make explicit a cultural gap. Diane and Virginia see respon-

sibility differently, and neither changed their positions. Diane saw Deborah as having too much responsibility at home, and Virginia saw Deborah having to resist "tidal waves of irresponsibility." Let this discussion of responsibility stand for other perspectives based on cultural differences that usually remain unexplored.

Responsibility is an important word to Deborah and her family. Deborah wrote in her notebook (3/13/97):

> Re-spon-si-ble
>
> Responsible means able to answer ones conduct and obligation and trustworthiness. Responsible means talking care of things that belong to me. Being able to do my work at home at school and at church without somebdy always telling me to do what I know I have to do and following instructions well. Responsible means I should behave well so that my little sisters would have a good example of me. I should obey the rules at school and everywhere I go. That I must do my writing, reading, and drawing everyday and do them well. Being responsible means trying not to do wrong to other peole. It also means listening to my parents.

Diane was alert to Deborah's exploration of responsibility. After Deborah complained that Patricia was too bossy, Diane and Deborah had the following conversation (5/27/97):

> Diane: What are you the boss of?
>
> Deborah: Nothing.
>
> Diane: What do you want to be the boss of?
>
> Deborah: Nothing.
>
> Diane: Do you feel like you are one of the younger kids in class?
>
> Deborah: Yes.
>
> Diane: Are there any bosses in this class?
>
> Deborah: Sometimes boss means bossy.
>
> Diane: Are you ever bossy?
>
> Deborah: Yes, with my sister. My mom says I am supposed to be. I am supposed to be an example. (Gives more details here.)
>
> Diane: Do you want me to tell your mom to let you off from being in charge of your sister. You work hard at that.
>
> Deborah: No.
>
> Diane: Well, how about once every other week or something like that. Deborah agrees "yes," with a smile of relief.

In the second year, when Diane told Virginia that Deborah was "playing with larger questions like who was in charge at home," she suggested Deborah might have less responsibility at home. Virginia responded (2/18/98):

> Sometimes I think all she wants to do is get married and begin housekeeping. I think she thinks she should be in charge or be allowed to do whatever she wants. I want her to focus on her role as an eight-year-old child. She can't settle down academically, she forgets what she is not interested in, she does her work just to get over it. She is irresponsible.

After Deborah moved on to the fourth grade, in response to my quoting that transcript passage in a draft, Virginia wrote:

> I am wondering who is in charge of my house here, Diane or Me? I don't know that Deborah has any other responsibility at home but to herself: Study her Sabbath school lesson, learn her memory verse, do her schoolwork and the personal hygiene part and also taking care of her personal things and surroundings—which sounds like much but most of which can be done in two hours. I have never given her the responsibility to take care of her sisters. I have always told her she has a God-given responsibility to be an example to them, not a mother. Deborah's reasons for not having her home work in class were not because they were not done and certainly not because she has any responsibility towards her sisters. I think Diane is being more judgmental than reasonable.

Views of responsibility vary. I saw things more like Diane than Virginia. From my notes (5/7/98):

> In the parent gathering we are reflecting on a piece of writing, and Deborah signals her mother from the doorway by entering a few feet into the room. With a combination of whispers and pantomime, she tells her mother that her five-year-old sister's pants are wet. In my family I would have jumped up to deal with any emotional fallout and the wet pants. Virginia glanced up and said, "It's your job. You handle it." And Deborah did. Entirely. She went to the Lost and Found for clean clothes and we didn't see her until the meeting was over.

However one might view Deborah's two hours of home responsibilities or her caretaking of her sister at school, Virginia and Diane will likely never agree on whether eight-year-old Deborah was too responsible or not responsible enough. Although, both Virginia and Diane noticed how Deborah takes time out from her own work to help others, and how that trait overlaps with her own preferences and interest in responsibility, Diane and Virginia have two different ideas of how a child should be in the world.

Yet one outcome of this likely cultural difference is that Virginia feels seriously responsible for helping Deborah to learn. "If it is in the classroom, I can reinforce it; if it isn't, I can't" (10/16/98). In her third year at PS 3, Virginia appears confident in both Deborah's learning and in her own part in it. This growth in confidence, I believe, came as a result of Virginia's ongoing participation in Diane's classroom as she observed, discussed, and reflected with other adults each month in a group where everyone's voice held equal weight.

Trust and Academics

Diane does not encourage children to revise their work, nor does she value a strong academic push until children "feel it in their belly." Virginia's experience in doing things "properly" and Diane's quest for children's interests, questions, and struggles, rather than their academic skills, were genuine value differences. Much of Deborah's early work was bookish and did not have the "stamp of the child." During the formal Descriptive Review processes of looking at children's work, Virginia came to understand why Diane did not assess mechanics first, and how close reading changed the adult focus from a child's deficiencies to a child's strengths. Virginia did not change her position about the importance of conventional spelling, but rather than insist Deborah redo her homework to a correct adult standard, she began to ask Deborah: "Have you looked over your work to see that it is right?" She monitored the looking over rather than the redoing, a subtle but important difference that was not lost on Diane or the other parents. In turn, Virginia vividly described homework struggles so that Diane could understand what open-ended assignments did to an evening at home for a family accustomed to prescribed work.

As Deborah learned to trust herself academically, her increased trust in herself required that Virginia believe work "that came from the belly" (Diane's word for work that children chose to do) would serve Deborah's growth. By promoting that trust, Diane eased school for Deborah. Diane's willingness to engage Virginia, and Virginia's willingness to listen, grew out of continual exposure to each other's writing, the actual classroom, formal descriptive reviews, and a growing relationship with Diane and other parents. Ultimately, everything was discussible. Both mother's and teacher's academic goals are now the same—authentic work. It has taken some time to reach that point.

Virginia wrote to Diane at the end of the second year that Deborah's "tumultuous" first year had given way to "trust that the educational and character developmental bricks you have laid will be a firm foundation for her future." She also noted that the stomach pains Deborah has had since Pre-Kindergarten have completely gone.

In a departure from previous writing, she acknowledged her own foundations. Thanking Diane, she wrote, "I am of the belief that no one comes into our—my family's—lives without God's direct channeling. "

Creating Space for Home Culture

As she got to know Deborah's religious background over her third-grade year, Diane began to make opportunities for Deborah to share her passion for the Bible. In early March, at Diane's invitation, Deborah read aloud in circle the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the same story she had retold in her writing notebook eighteen months earlier. On Purim, Diane brought Hamantoschen for the class, explaining that these were part of her own cultural tradition, which prompted Deborah to volunteer her favorite story of Esther. Notice that Diane brought something of herself to create a space for Deborah's telling, rather than putting Deborah on the spot with a request to tell something about her religion, or by assigning everyone to contribute on a religious topic.

When I talked with Deborah, the pride and excitement in her voice—so clear on the tape—was evidence of a new classroom connection: "One thing I learned this year is that some people in the class are Jews." In *sotto voce*, she remembered, "Well actually I learned that last year because you told me." Overhearing this discussion about Jews, a Palestinian child in the class asked her, "Are you Jewish?" and when she said, "no," he added with a slightly combative tone, "If you aren't Jewish, then why are you talking about Jews?" Deborah said with total confidence: "There are stories that I know that Jews know. I know about Esther. Esther is a Jew."

For the first eighteen months in this classroom, Deborah didn't see her religion as something to bring to school, but ultimately she was able to share a piece of herself she never thought she could. This connection contributed to her own developing worldview. The sharing is also an opportunity for her own self-expression as she grows as a storyteller and becomes a carrier of her own culture.

Small, Slow, Subtle Shifts to Larger Ground

After Deborah went on to fourth grade, I wrote in a draft about Diane's belief that a seven year old cannot adopt her parents' beliefs as her own. Virginia took serious issue with Diane's position (as articulated by me) that religious understanding is developmental. Virginia wrote: "Religion is not talk; especially for a child, it is practiced." For her, the obligation to pass her religion on to Deborah is not a choice but a Biblical commandment. Virginia is clear: "I test all practices by the Word of God."

In reference to religion in a secular society, Virginia also wrote on my draft:

> I am aware of the times and world in which we live. I do not expect the world to make concessions for a Christian. We are its enemies. This world would certainly have been a better world if our children were taught to honor and respect the supreme Life given. I would not look to the school for understanding or concessions. It is my responsibility—not even the Church I attend, to teach my Children God's will for them and I know that sometimes we would have to stand alone.

These differences mean that no halfway measures to bring a child's religious identity into the classroom would serve Virginia. Virginia and Deborah and Diane did connect home with school in a way that enlarged all of their worldviews, but they did not replace any of their already held beliefs about religion.

Halloween is off the table; Deborah continues to stay home on Halloween. The community has not bent for Deborah or for its own sake. In her thoughtful book, *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World: Multicultural Education for Young Children*, Patricia Ramsey (1998) has a fantasy vision of the future, where discussion about having holiday celebrations would continue for a long time. I would hope that PS 3 would begin that discussion. Diane's call for change in a school council meeting has not yet been heard. Based on what we have learned in this study, I predict that any changes will come slowly.

Yet small, slow, subtle steps toward cultural interchange extend the common ground—a shift in attitude, a new way of seeing, a tiny action. At an early point, Diane misinterpreted Deborah's absence at Friday night slumber party as her parents not understanding the importance of school social life for Deborah's comfort in her new school. Diane (and I) had to stretch to realize that, rather than a deprivation to Deborah, the chance to honor God's law by worshipping on the Sabbath is a privilege. Deborah continues to miss Friday night slumber parties and Saturday events, but recently I heard a child having a small tantrum in front of her mother: "No, I don't want my party on Friday; I want it on Saturday night so Deborah can come."

On the other hand, Virginia adjusts her life to see that Deborah participates as fully as she can on non-Sabbath days. After a recent death in the family, Virginia wanted to take Deborah home at noon to ease her own schedule before the funeral. Instead, she let Deborah go on an all-day class trip so she would not miss the chance to participate in this unique school event. Virginia would not negotiate with God, but did not hesitate to inconvenience herself. On any weeknight picnic or Sunday all-school fundraiser, this family shows up.

Recently, over lunch, Virginia explained to me how happy it made her just to gaze on a picture of Jesus on the cover of the Bible study guide she carries in her purse. Her face radiated joy. Talking about religion at school is not so difficult any more.

What follows from greater teacher awareness of religious belief and religious diversity is not entirely clear. Even if First Amendment prohibitions do not arise, respect for the religions of others may call, not for discussion, but for acknowledgment and then respectful silence. Perhaps we should not be too quick to exclude from our schools what is so central to the lives of many of our children. Virginia wrote "Amen."

I watched Deborah accommodate to school in the first year, when on some days, as I said in my notes, "She reminds me of a butterfly who hasn't got enough sun yet to move" (5/30/97). In her second year, the classroom held more for her. Deborah may miss the community membership that Halloween implies in this particular community, but Deborah has more than one connection to school. She starred in a class play about aliens, dressed in a sophisticated black dress that fit her love of dressing up. She loves to mentor her sister, now a pre-K student at PS 3. Diane wrote in her 1998 narrative report that Deborah is "remarkably social" and has become "an almost daily presenter of her ideas, quite generous about sharing her knowledge and intimate feelings." The report is full of new interests; the list is long. Because Diane and PS 3 created multiple pathways over two years for the McManns to enter the school community, family and teacher were able to build an alliance on behalf of Deborah's learning. That warm embrace between home and school ultimately moved the butterfly's wings.

Toward Conclusions

Society's expectation is that children will be changed by school, but our team is arguing for cultural interchange—that school practice should also evolve in response to children and that educators should give home values more weight. Granted, policymakers do not make policy based on a single case, but looking closely at how the school community embodies or distorts support for one child's learning can open up opportunities to reflect on home-school policies. Keeping that frame in mind, I have sketched out some implications that evolved from Diane's classroom and Deborah's family.

Cultural Interchange Is Based on Relationships That Grow Over Time

The capacity to see through others' eyes is not a one-shot event. Parents and teachers need time to develop relationships on safe ground before they are ready to reveal their personal backgrounds. Especially, when teachers work with children and families who are very different from themselves, recognizing what is central to another person (in Deborah's case her relationship with God), then understanding, appreciating, and taking account of it in action requires educators to engage over time with parents.

At first, the pace of cultural interchange proceeds slowly and unevenly. On Parent's Night, Joel's father asked: "How do you find the kids respect each other?" Had Halloween preceded Back to School Night, I doubt Virginia would have felt comfortable enough so early to raise her concern about lack of respect for Deborah's religious beliefs. That teachers and families were together for two years gave cultural interchange a chance to develop. Even noticing slow subtle shifts and then making them explicit requires long looking. To capture cultural interchange, researchers have to be careful—too brief a stay risks taking only a snapshot.

Offering Multiple Entry Points Means Rejecting the Numbers Game

The parental role need not be determined by the school, since the school is not necessarily the center of a family's life (Weber, 1997). This study suggests that by providing multiple entry points to the classroom community—and not assuming that any one structure is right for all parents—families will come to feel they themselves are helpful to their children's learning in *whatever way they can be.* Adopting such an attitude would

reduce the common school lament, "but no one came," that often describes an event that most of the invitees did not attend. Small numbers should not deter schools from offering options. Not every parent enjoys formal monthly descriptive reviews, but the experience is powerful for those who do. Not every busy parent reads teachers' letters, but for some no substitute exists for the written word. Not every parent has the time or temperament for classroom participation, but the invitation creates a compelling possibility.

Unrestricted Access Is Important for Developing Relationships

The process of cultural interchange between home and school, I have come to believe, must include opportunities for families to have unrestricted access to the classroom, especially when the school and the parents' own experiences differ. Diane's open-door invitation to enter the classroom at any time could be in and of itself threatening to many teachers and administrators, but educators must begin to think hard about it as both schools and demographics change. Children and their families must feel welcome at school and in the classroom so they can develop informal relationships that lead to trust, and therefore greater identification with each other. Teachers must warmly embrace the families of the children they teach. For too long, educators have tended to cultivate distance—except when they need "parents as partners" to cooperate with the schools' agenda.

Images Matter to Policy

Inviting families in—at their convenience, on their terms—requires a major change of attitude. That shift from indifference and distancing to genuine invitation requires slow, subtle moves. Often tiny actions are significant. On the first day of school, Diane stood at her classroom door beckoning parents in with a dramatic hand motion. The image of a teacher's openhanded gesture drawing families into the classroom needs to be in every policymaker's head before good home-school policies can be enacted.

Political Power Is Not the Only Measure of Access

In Diane's class, the parents who became engaged in daily classroom life did not want the power to make curricular, budget, or hiring decisions, although those avenues were available in the wider school arena. I suspect that parents felt participating in the classroom was more authentic and satisfying than the all-school forums (Anderson, 1998). The "rightness" of the fit between what parents wanted and what Diane offered in the classroom worked for these parents. Perhaps after the pathways between home and school are well traveled, families will be more interested in joining school governance efforts, but it is a mistake to assume that the exercise of political power is the only measure of access to school.

Amy Wells (1998) suggests that college-educated parents are the ones demanding access to school and the right to make decisions, therefore reinforcing the parents' middle class status. Most (all?) parents and children will benefit by a closer relationship with school through the classroom. Therefore, access—even if it comes initially without wider school decision-making power—is necessary for forming relationships between parents and teachers. I realize that, as Michelle Fine (1993) points out, this position leads

individual families to advocate for their own children and risks diluting their wider political engagement. But a focus on school politics, with all the power struggle that entails, can dilute potential relationships that benefit children directly. This is a tension.

Professionals Must Cultivate a "Working Trust" with Families

Because parents have a responsibility to help teachers understand their own views, there must be opportunities for parents and teachers to get to know each other. Yet it is hard for families—especially those outside the mainstream—to initiate a conversation. Especially for families who belong to groups that traditionally feel less powerful or less comfortable in schools, it is the professionals who must cultivate the trust that leads to understanding and respect. Call it a "working trust" when families and educators communicate easily and well. A working trust—teacher and parents do not have to become best friends—allows everyone to become more open about discussing problems, better able to explain what they mean, and less worried about offending each other. When disagreements arise, they have a better chance to work out the human tangles. This ideal is one crucial outcome of cultural interchange.

Formal Processes May Nurture a "Working Trust"

For the eight or so parents interested in gathering together each month, Diane used the formal processes developed by Patricia Carini (Prospect, 1986) to initiate conversation, but many different collaborative forums work. Regular formal ongoing conversations allow parents and teachers to bridge the gap that usually separates "expert" school personnel from families who know their children best. As parents and teachers gain a greater understanding of each other's perspectives, they develop stronger voices to articulate their own fears, knowledge, and priorities. Virginia did not want her child to stand out as different. Both mother and child were concerned that no one was interested, and the general discomfort about religion in a secular place all contributed to the silence, but reducing the usual school-home boundaries in these monthly groups provided an opportunity for both Diane and Virginia to see each other's point of view on many issues, not just religion.

Encouraging Cultural Knowledge: A Dilemma and a Challenge

Teachers often act without knowing cultural information. The teacher as ethnographer is a worthy response to the challenge of building on the diverse cultures in the classroom (Mehan et al., 1995), but cultural interchange depends on more than careful observation, an open mind, and specific knowledge or facts, although all of these are welcome. Teachers need to develop the habit of thinking about children's cultures, noticing patterns, building up evidence to anchor their impressions, sharing their conclusions with one another, and examining their own attitudes. This exhortation to dig deeply into culture, however, competes with inducements to keep our eyes on the child's learning. Teachers cannot be expected to know what I, as a researcher, found out about Deborah's family. Even with sophisticated cultural knowledge, the dilemma still persists whether to foreground the child's cultural background or the child's individuality. Keeping both in mind simultaneously is a challenge.

Unexpected Differences Are Difficult to Detect

To be open to cultural nuances is hard when we are unaware of what cultural differences are salient to the students and their parents. Because Diane's approach tends to be highly attuned to individual differences, her vision is mostly accommodated to variation. But detecting family differences when they are not in expected categories—for instance, religion—is a formidable task. If we do not know the category, it is hard; and if we do, that is maybe all we see.

Further Thoughts on Cultural Interchange

Diane took a strong stand: "Cultural interchange is human interchange. It happens wherever people are together." Cultural interchange—as Diane construed it—unfolded in her class without an explicit focus on children's cultural differences or an emphasis on what children can learn through a curriculum about other cultures.

Diane's classroom practice has remained amazingly consistent over fifteen years. What happens in her class evolves out of children's shared interests in each other and their world as they travel the city, read books of their choice, write what they want, draw what they chose, and do the math problems that arise out of daily life. "Living together and sharing perspectives" is Diane's curriculum. Diane's view of the world—through the lens of human variety rather than cultural difference—is one way of seeing that does not put culture, race, ethnicity, or religion at the center. Until Diane registered the importance of Deborah's religion, that part of Deborah's life remained outside the classroom.

Some might argue (and have argued) that Diane's class involves little cultural interchange, since her own values prevail and she does not create a new classroom each year from the varied cultural norms families bring to school. True enough. Rather, her values lead to a classroom that eases school for children and includes them in an expanding, expansive community where she works to help them find a place to belong. To increase mutual understanding among children, she exposes them to other perspectives in order to widen their own; she responds to individuals, but relishes their interdependence. She provides entry points for parents, encouraging them to engage in school life and contribute in whatever way they can.

Persistent Blinders

Each member of our team saw cultural interchange differently (Bensman, 1999, McGregor, 1999, Xu, 1999).[33] Diane's classroom is one variation. I struggle to hear these other versions. Aside from not knowing the initial dimensions of what we were looking for, we did not know how this slippery process of interchange would affect our own perspectives. It turned out that becoming aware of own cultural lenses, which

[33]Team colleagues David Bensman, Kemly McGregor, and Jianzhong Xu each wrote their case studies based on different premises about cultural interchange. Their studies appear under separate cover in this NCREST series.

operate involuntarily below the surface of consciousness, was more arduous than we thought. Opposing themes of openness and narrowness persist. Habits of mind and habits of looking are embedded in the study like fool's gold in a hunk of pyrite. Even when mined and exposed to the open air, old ways of perceiving the world fade slowly, if at all. Deeply held values do not change easily; nor perhaps, should they. They point us to experiences we perhaps need to seek out.

When I look over a classroom or a parent group, I now imagine that they are as different from me as I am from the participants in this study, including my colleagues on the research team. This major personal learning from the project gives me some notion of how far we have to go in making school comfortable places for *all* students and their families.

A task, then, is to hear the other voices and reflect with openness on what changes one can live with without abandoning core values or, as some might say, without blinders. My personal biases cause me to identify (some have said overidentify) with Diane's perspective. Along with Diane, I have a visceral response to the triviality of standardized tests and the philosophy behind them. I am not much enamored of portfolios with indicators and rubrics either. I like evaluation to be up close and personal—where there is a relationship between the evaluator and whoever is being evaluated so they can, as Ted Sizer (founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools) says, look each other in the eye. I support all the independence and problem-solving that is not necessarily the cultural norm for families.

There is another side that I profess to be willing to hear, but it challenges my basic values. Perhaps Diane's "easing" school may also make school too "easy." Perhaps I ignored the opportunities she missed for pushing children to excel at formal academics and standardized tests, or ignored the signals that parents wanted more obedience and less self-reliance. The result is that I have built into this study a defense of progressive pedagogy. I believe that progressive principles—rethought for today's diverse classrooms—have a better chance to improve learning for children outside the middle-class mainstream than increased reliance on standards imposed from a distance and high stakes standardized tests that produce winners (usually White) and therefore losers (disproportionately people of color). Some say I can afford to take this position since I—and my children—already have a secure place in the middle-class world. It is a dilemma that has the capacity to shift my whole way of seeing the world. I have not resolved it.

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